



Drawing

Sexy

Women

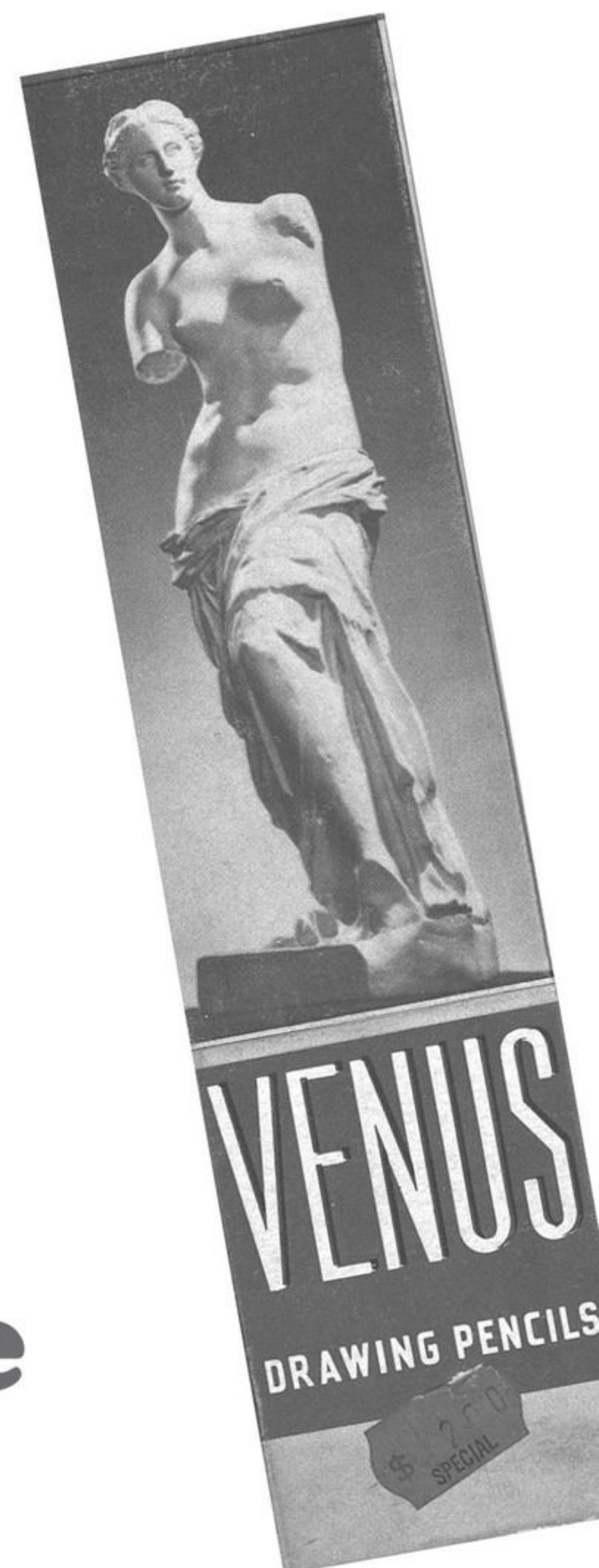
Autobiographical Sketches
Frank Thorne

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Frank Thorne





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The computer has rendered the pencil obsolete. Freehand pencil drawing is retrograde and hopelessly out of date. True, there are still a few wooden pencils in private hands, but most are seen only in museums. The Smithsonian has a rare A.W. Faber HB Castell, made in 19th century Nuremberg, used by King Ludwig I of Bavaria to sketch his beauteous mistress Lola Montez *au naturel*.

If you unearth one of these archeological specimens, you will find it practical for the removal of earwax, navel lint, or as a baton for conducting a small orchestra. However, if you are intrigued by this ancient pursuit, a section on practical drawing of beautiful women begins on page 73.

As you will see in this slim volume of narrated memory sketches, the pencil, as a drawing instrument, does have the power to evoke glandular reveries. Each chapter herein is dedicated to a lady. The first a child of the '40s, on through a bouquet of beauties to our enlightened age.



Lenore

The plot was Warren Stebner's idea. Blame Ethel Nordmyer for the inspiration. Lenore Lans sat across from me in Franklin School. Joan Peins may have been the prettiest girl in the sixth grade, but Lenore had rounded pubescence and was closing in on fully ripe. Lenore was the preeminent sower of craving for the cadre of half-pint Captain Marvels in Ethel Nordmyer's class. Ethel resembled Eleanor Roosevelt, which could have been the reason why my father, a staunch Republican, never went to P.T.A. meetings.

Where are thou with thine apple, Miss Ethel? Whither the juice that dripped upon luscious Lenore's budding bosom?

Only Reverend Potter was a worse bore than Ethel. We'd nod off every time he droned on with his "Eden's Apple" sermon up at the Holy Comforter. So that steamy day in May when Ethel held up the big red macintosh, my eyes began to glaze over like a dead flounder.

It was Thursday and Lenore was wearing her white eyelet dress again. Jimmy Decker said that she never wore a stitch under that eyelet dress. Nobody believed anything Jimmy Decker said except that Lenore didn't wear anything under that white eyelet dress on Thursdays. There'd be no way of knowing unless we asked, and no girl in Rahway except Alice Southerd would've answered a question like that. Alice Southerd moved away in the fifth grade. She weighed 200 pounds so we wouldn't have asked her anyway.

Every Thursday morning the subject was economics. "The science of production and distribution of goods and..." Ethel was into the snorer and the Marvel Platoon was just east of Mongo when we heard "Lenore, please step to the front of the class." Ethel draped herself in a black shawl and handed Lenore the apple. There they were, Snow White and the wicked queen, right in front of the old Hammond map of the world. Instruction was lost to craving. Who among the Marvels could care that Snow White was the buyer of the apple, and Her Highness the seller. Forget the dynamics of commerce. "Look deep into my eyes," Ethel whispered to luscious Lenore. "Now take a bite of the apple, deary."

God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden..."

Lenore was staring at the apple. Ethel urged her on with a hypnotic gesture. As she brought it toward her face Lenore slowly ran her tongue around her lips, glanced at the Marvels, and took a mouth-watering bite out of the crisp macintosh. Juice oozed from the ruby orb and a languid strand alighted on her pure white eyelet-clad bosom.



Forget Disney. Snow White had long lost to Lois De Fee, Winnie Garret and Tempest Storm. The Marvels shared a worn collection of *Keyhole*, *Titter*, and *Peep Show* that was stashed in a Hormel meat box behind Eddie Svera's house. It was in a hole that we dug on the bank of the Rahway River.

Looking at Lenore as she sashayed back to her seat I knew the Marvels would be comparing her to their favorites. Fudder would cast his vote for De Fee, both Stebner and Eddie would be Garret, and me, a reluctant Storm man. My favorite was *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*, a cartoon which didn't count in the tally.

Stebner launched the scheme at recess in the woods behind Koos Brothers furniture store, next to Franklin School.

"I've been reading this book on hypnotism by the Comte de Saint Germaine," he said as he passed it to the Marvels for inspection. "I got it from the Johnson Smith catalogue."

Fudder read a blurb from the cover. "That strange, compelling force by which almost anyone can bring others under his power."

We all looked at each other.

Eddie said it. "Lenore."

Stebner proposed a vote.

This time the referendum was unanimous. It was sure-fire, especially if we used a method devised by a bona fide Comte. We'd know soon enough if Jimmy Decker had it right about Thursdays.

It was a long sleepless night wrestling with the image of the Marvels being convicted of perverted acts and crimes against nature and being hauled off to the youth correctional institution in Jamesburg.



Dawn lessened the fever of guilt. Nothing fires the redemptive process like the odor of a freshly sharpened wooden pencil, so I got my A.W. Faber #2 and started drawing a picture of Lenore. The head came out OK, but the body looked like it belonged to Tempest Storm. Had the plot already brought Lenore to ruin? Her youth ravaged, was she doomed to a life of tawdry exhibitionism, or worse — white slavery?



Saturday morning the Marvels met under the Church Street bridge near the stash. Now, *revealed for you, the secrets of hypnotism*. Stebner was quoting the Compté. He looked around with a wolfish smile and flipped to another dog-eared page. "Lesson one: Choosing your subject."

Eddie was up on his feet. "We gotta try it out first. Who's gonna volunteer?"

Fudder was skimming rocks across the river as if he didn't hear. Fudd was a natural. He was afraid of the dark, and he listened to Ma Perkins. He always said that his mother listened and he could hear it from down in the cellar, but we caught him with the show on in his room. He had Kate Smith on once, too. Fudd had the biggest comic book collection in Rahway, so we never mocked him for listening to girl radio shows.

It seemed like Fudd was turning over rocks for an hour looking for salamanders while Stebner was reading the book. Then Stebner started on Fudd, who by then had an Ovaltine can with three salamanders and a polliwog in it.

Could be that Stebner blew it by acting too much like Bela Lugosi when he did his incantations, because Fudd wouldn't even say what his middle name was, which we always wanted to know. Eddie said he heard the V. stood for Virgil, but I thought it might be Victor because Fudd had an uncle Victor who was bald and worked at Mercks. Rahway was famous for the Merck Chemical Company and being the burial site of the M.G.M lion. At least that's what Uncle Collins told me.

If there was a spell cast, it was on the polliwog which was as dead as Mr. Scarda's cat which he drowned in a sack full of rocks in the Rahway River. We saw him do it.

The Deckers had seven kids, all boys except for Astrid. A half-pint Shirley Temple, Astrid had the potential of being hotter than Lenore in a couple of years. Stebner suggested we try the trance on Astrid, so we headed for the Deckers to talk to Jimmy. If he knew so much about Lenore, he could prove it by letting Stebner practice on an actual girl.

Warren Stebner was a bully and Astrid knew it, so maybe she hopped around and squawked and barked because she was afraid he would beat her up. Anyway, the spells worked. Right there next to the chicken coop were five Deckers, four Marvels, two dogs and a Muscovy duck watching Astrid make a jackass out of herself.





Thursday morning the recess bell sounded and we emptied out into the schoolyard. Lenore was talking to Alice Peal. No Marvels ever talked to Alice Peal because she played the saxophone. Actually, we didn't talk to any girls in the whole school except Astrid. Lurking behind that wall of silence was a furnace of lust fired by Lois, Winnie, and Tempest.

We were standing by the backstop watching the game while Stebner, with his eyes closed, was going over his incantations. Soon, under the Compte's spell, Lenore would tell us the answer to the preeminent question. She left Alice and floated along the first base line, heading for the backstop.

It has been reported that in Bismark, North Dakota, the winters are so severe that an unprotected human can turn to ice in sixty seconds. Lenore reached us in thirty and we were frozen solid.

"Let's not, and say we did," she cooed as she passed by, heading for Jimmy Stoneberger, the eighth-grade running back for the Franklin Indians.

Later on we figured that Lenore must have ordered the Comte's book on mind-reading from the Johnson Smith catalogue. The next day Stebner traded the hypnotism book to Ronald Yo for a deck of cards with pictures of ladies not wearing any underwear. A couple of weeks later a really big storm caused the Rahway to flood over its banks. The Hormel box with Winnie, Lois, and Tempest on board probably floated all the way to the Atlantic ocean. As for me, I preferred Sheena anyway.



Sheena

Fudder didn't believe me that Sheena was in our back yard that summer. If he told me that Lois De Fee was at his house I wouldn't have believed him, either. "Uncle Collins brought her. She's laying right there on a Navajo blanket in a two-piece bathing suit." Fudd was on the front walk of his house, pouring salt on a slug as big as your thumb. "That's a load of it. Sheena's a cartoon," he said, as the slug disintegrated into a puddle of goo.

We headed up River Road toward my house. Fudd knew about how my Uncle Collins was a Hollywood hairdresser and a movie star. I told everybody that Collie was in *Wings* with Gary Cooper and how he knew Hedy Lamarr because he set her hair. I never saw *Wings*, and neither did Fudd, but we did see Hedy Lamarr in *Crossroads* down at the Rahway Theater. It was a Saturday. It came on after the Captain Marvel serial.

"He came yesterday," I boasted. "Straight from Hollywood, and he's staying until tomorrow."

"Is he driving the '41 Chrysler eight with the fluid drive?" Fudder asked.

"Yep, and he brought two other ladies and Ford, his valet!"

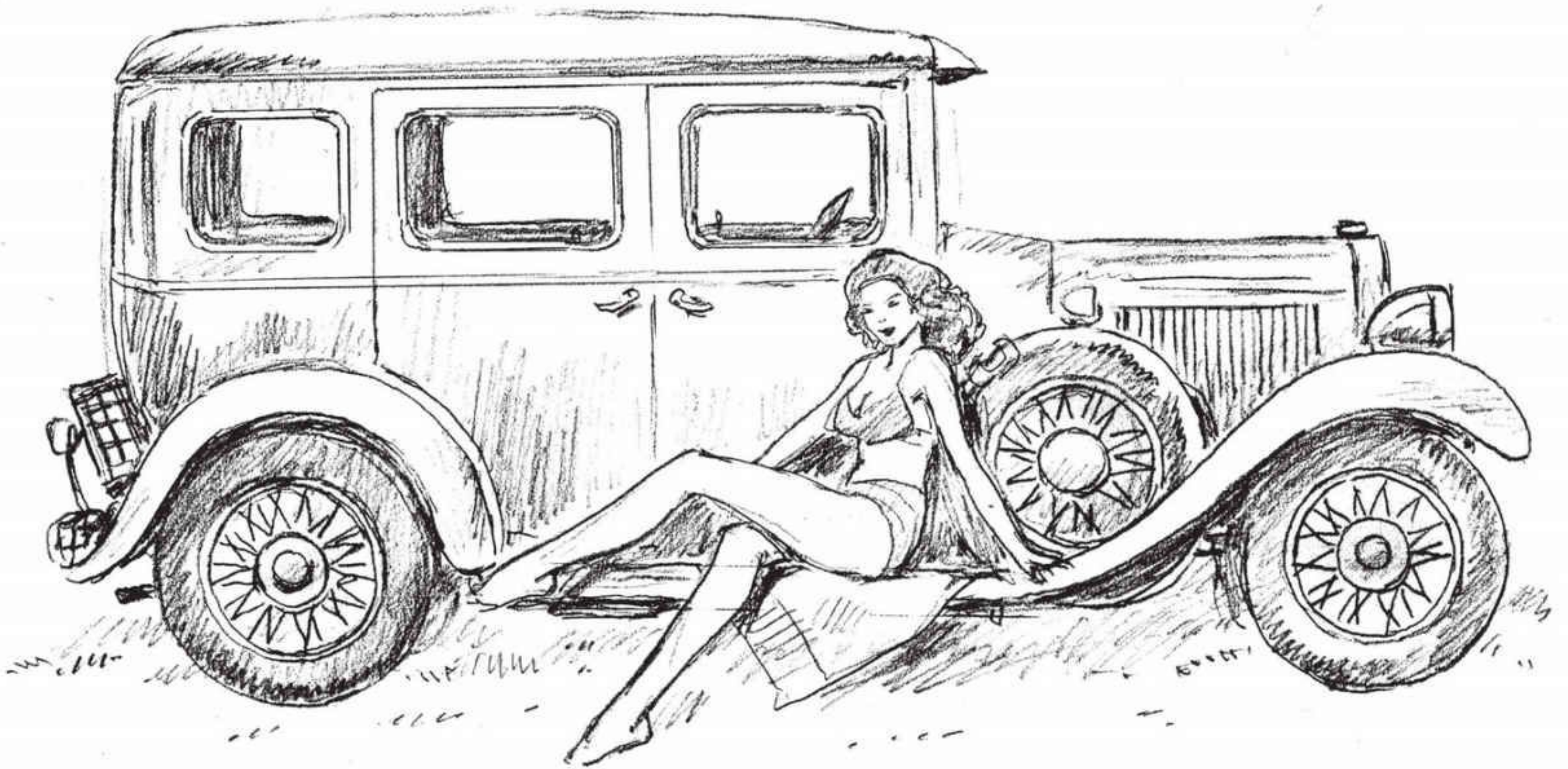
"There she is!" Sheena was sunbathing next to the guinea pig cage. She didn't notice us looking out of the garage window.

"Wow!" Fudd's eyes were bulging. "That ain't Sheena, she's got blonde hair. That's Lois De Fee!" Fudd was feverish, itching and scratching all over like when he was looking at *Peep Show*.

"It ain't neither of them. That's Maria Montez. She's going to be Sheena in a movie. Collie told me so himself."

Fudd was so close to the window that his breath was steaming up the glass and he was rocking back and forth. I could tell he had to whiz.

Fudd let fly into what we called the "relief tube," which was a glass funnel with a hose attached that my father had hung in the garage. The hose went out through a hole in the wall and into the garden. When caught short, we would pee into the funnel. The squash from that part of the garden grew bigger than anywhere else. I never ate any really big squash or tomatoes from that time on.



Uncle Collins spotted us in the garage next to the '33 Chevy. He couldn't miss seeing Fudd finishing up.

"Fudder!" he called. "You show me yours, and I'll show you mine!"

Fudder thought it was a joke, but I knew better. Collie was a cross between the Tazmanian Devil and P. T. Barnum. He was wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a fez. I'd never seen him with a fez before, but the highball was familiar. Actually, Ford was more than a valet, and his lady friends were no ladies.

Sheena in the back yard, and Carmen Miranda on the back porch. A fat Carmen Miranda with a Chihuahua. Not a genuine Carmen Miranda, but a Collie Carmen Miranda.

"Fudder, come meet Bernice!" Collie urged as he pushed Fudd toward the mountain of flesh topped with a fruit-salad hat.

"Chica Chica Boom Chic!" she trilled, then wound up and delivered the most corpulent bump since Presley's last gig in Valdosta Georgia.

Fudd always said that Collie's other lady friend was a man. He introduced her as Astarte, the Mother Goddess of the Canaanites. She had a deathly pallor, and was thinner than Rose Marie Miller, who was the skinniest girl in the sixth grade. Astarte mostly played cards, and had the loudest laugh I ever heard.

Being famous made Collie good at telling dirty jokes. When he started his routine I was always sent outside, but I could hear them all laughing as I walked along the path to Fudder's house. You could hear Astarte's cackle above everybody else's. Fudd was right about Astarte being a fella. He and Ford were an item. Ford was a hairdresser, too, and was always asking me to draw pictures of his friends. Mostly I made pictures from my imagination. Sometimes I copied them from *Peep Show*. The first time I sketched real people was when Collie visited with his friends.

My drawing of Maria Montez was better than the one of Lenore Lans because I got the body to fit the head. Ford had her sit on the running board of the '33 Chevy, but Fudd thought it would be better if she posed on the Chrysler.





I never asked Maria Montez about the *Sheena* movie but I did go to the Rahway Theater and saw *Cobra Woman* and Maria Montez was in it. There must have been two actresses with the same name because the one in the movie didn't look anything like my drawing. My brother always said that Collie might have been in *Wings*, but his part landed on the cutting room floor. I never believed him. I knew if I ever saw *Wings* Uncle Collins would be right up there with Gary Cooper. My brother didn't believe that it was Maria Montez on the Chevy, either. But maybe he was right about Bernice being a famous New York City madam.

Aunt Madge

My Aunt Madge didn't like Collie and Collie didn't like the ocean, so mostly we'd see Madge at the shore house in Lavallette on the Jersey shore. We were down for a week in August and Aunt Madge came for a visit with Uncle Harold. He may have been a big executive, but she was the boss. He drove a brand new 1942 12-cylinder La Salle, which beat out Collie's Chrysler. Charlie Koos had an emerald-green 12-cylinder Pierce Arrow which beat out both of them.

Seeing that we just bought two watermelons from Clayton's Market, I was mostly covered with watermelon juice after lunch. Mom said no swimming for an hour, so I went out on the beach to look for Nazi submarines. I thought I saw one once, but Uncle Harold said it was just a fishing trawler. Later Aunt Madge came out to sun herself like Maria Montez next to the guinea pig cage.

The surf was up when I went in for a swim to wash off the watermelon juice. Then Aunt Madge came sloshing in for a dip. She was wearing a bathing suit that would have fit Lenore Lans better. Madge had skinny legs, but the rest of her looked like Collie's Carmen Miranda.

The waves were tossing us around and Aunt Madge was in front of me knee deep when a wave surprised her from behind. She went splashing down. As she was floundering a bulge came flopping out of her suit bigger than even on Tempest Storm. It was fairly gleaming in the sunshine, and it was no more than two feet from my nose.

Aunt Madge saw me focused on that bulge like it was a Nazi U-Boat, and while she flipped it back in she gave me a wink like I saw Hedy Lamarr give William Powell in *Crossroads*.

I got a terrible case of sunburn that day. Mom put Noxema all over me. I could smell it for days, even after it washed off. Every time I smell Noxema I think of Aunt Madge, Carmen Miranda, and watermelons.





Bonnie

There it is, Bloom. Thrills. Adventure. Romance. Everything you ever dreamed of is down there...beautiful ladies with long legs...

It was my drawings of Lenore, Collie's bizarre buddies, and Aunt Madge that got me into the Art Career School on top of the Flatiron Building on 23rd and Fifth in New York City.

"You've got a knack for drawing women," said Alberta Ellison, the director. She was flipping through my portfolio. "Hmmm, who is this?" She was pondering my sketch of Astarte.

"The Mother Goddess of the Canaanites," I replied. "At least that's what she called herself. She's a friend of my Uncle Collins."

"Then this would be Astarte, or perhaps Ishtar," she mumbled as she lit another cigarette. "Decadent. Even charming," she concluded.

Bertie's hair was at war with her head and her head was losing. It was a fractious white mass over a face lined by a lifetime of smoking Lucky Strikes.

"And who posed for this?" She'd come to my pastel rendering of Maria Montez.

"Whoever it is, she's wearing her big ribcage today." Larry Austin, the life class instructor, had waltzed into Bertie's office and was looking over her shoulder. "*Sont beaux gros tes seins!*" he observed as he pointed at Maria's boobs.

The models for Larry's class were routine marvels of the human form. Irene was over fifty, with rollicking rolls of fat. Dave was a skinny ballet dancer. We started off the third week with Bonnie.

It was Russ Meyer's muse wearing nothing but three tulips. Bonnie was a gorgeous twenty-four-year old with luxuriant auburn hair. She had curves that could have corrected the erectile dysfunction of every man-jack in the Western Hemisphere. Larry was flitting around the class postulating with a Windsor Newton #6 Russian sable brush to sixteen kids with drawing boards and pads while in the back sat a middle-aged man in a brown uniform sketching on a folded Daily News with a ball point pen. Charlie Long, who sat next to me, said that the guy was an elevator operator.

"He brings her up, so he knows every time she poses."

The changing booth beside the modeling stand became the perfumed chamber of Aphrodite. Her manly acolytes would sit on the right side of the room perhaps to get a forbidden glimpse of the goddess undressing behind the green curtain. She would emerge draped in a golden vesture, mount the altar, liberate her seraphic figure from its bondage, and assume a pose. The apostolic order would then fall to their penitentiary duties of rendering their deity in chalk, charcoal, or clay.

Adios Lenore and Sheena. Adieu Lois, Winnie, and Tempest. Farewell innocence...





Hy Eisman and I were on 42nd Street. We were coming out of Captain Cora's Flea Circus, which was a Times Square freak show. "She's built like a brick shithouse!" I thought he was talking about Cora, who didn't look anything like a captain.

"We gotta get some shots of Bonnie." Hy continued. "There's a store on Broadway that sells miniature cameras."

Heading down Broadway toward 23rd we came to a classic Manhattan souvenir shop. The window was a neon miasma of tourist bait. Plastic radios, replicas of the Empire State Building, and statues of liberty in all sizes. We went in and Hy bought a tiny working version of a Leica and a roll of film.

On the corner of 31st was Ike Zola's eatery. Ike dispensed, among other things, the best egg cream in town to the Manhattan cognoscenti. Hy ordered two chocolates and a knish. We were making plans for the photographing of Bonnie.

"Dribbling sincerely will not a Pollack of you make." Larry Austin, another egg cream connoisseur, plopped down next to us. Jackson Pollack was happening, and the whole school was dribbling except Hy and me. We wanted to be cartoonists.

Jeff Chandler was the most famous grad of Art Career School — not for his art, but for being the first Jewish Indian chief in the movie *Cochise*.

"Here's Jeff." Larry dealt a photo from three stacks he had arranged face down on the table like he was hustling three card monte. Hy passed the shot over to me. "And here's Henthorne." We knew Henthorne, he was the only student that was serving time in the slammer for grand larceny. "And here's..." On it went through his documentary of selected student's pudenda. Each was a black and white photo of a flaccid schvontzer.

Louie Fierstein was a short intense man who resembled Leon Trotsky. He taught a painting class in a tiny room at the prow of the Flatiron. The parapet outside Louie's classroom was the premiere launching site for paper airplanes over 23rd Street and into Madison Square Park. One afternoon Al Kilgore played the entire Hallelujah Chorus with his hand cupped under his armpit as the prelude to The Great Paper and Mixed Media Airplane Race of 1948. Charlie Long won with a plane made entirely of rubber cement, a work of genius that deserved to be enshrined in the Smithsonian Aerospace Museum.

The evil Black Pharoah is dead! Taia, rejoin Prince Amenotep, his ardor has not lessened after four thousand years...

Fierstein was a resurrected Bolshevik. He did drawings for *The Daily Worker*, and could be found on warm days haranguing a knot of vagrants and weary office workers at the base of the Admiral Farragut statue in Madison Square Park. It was *The Daily Worker* stuff that blew Louie's cover. His Lenin looked like Ibis The Invincible, and his sketches of Emma Goldman brought to mind Taia, Ibis's girlfriend, in mufti.

Louie had a secret life as a comic book artist. During the day he taught painting. At night he was an inker on Ibis, the dapper mage with his wand called the Ibistick, which was a kind of wooden Superman that had amazing powers. Hy and I confronted him after one of his tirades in the park. Louie confessed, but was too pugnacious to show remorse. We demanded only that he allow us to worship him.



Larry's class was assembled, and Hy was ready for the shoot. There was a trio of nonchalant window washers working away on the parapet. The top floor had the cleanest windows on Fifth Avenue because of Bonnie. As she swept into the room and headed for the changing booth, the pace of the cleaning slowed. Larry spotted the three stooges. "Man the blinds!" he ordered, as he moved to the front of the class to field questions before the pose.

The girls all loved Larry because he was a ringer for Charlton Heston. "Mr. Austin," inquired Florence Andreason, "why is it that male models wear fig leaves and the females wear nothing?"

"Ugly bulk," Larry explained to the winsome blonde who was a devotee of Mary Cassatt. "The male organ is aesthetically superfluous."

What Flo didn't know was that Larry harbored the biggest collection of ugly bulk east of the Mississippi.

"Well, I see we're working with clay this morning," chirped Larry as he patted Hy's behind. "Just don't make her look like Minnie Mouse." Hy was calmly adjusting the espionage camera inside the lump of Plasticene as Bonnie stepped up and doffed her robe.

If Hy, a Harold Foster fan, wasn't preoccupied with snapping pictures of Bonnie, he would have sketched her to look like Aleta, Prince Valiant's main squeeze. The prints of Bonnie were a grainy sensation, and the hottest bootleg item on the 23rd floor since Jean Meise rolled her bare butt with ink and sat on a sheet of blockprint paper and passed it around to all the guys in the freshman class.



"Bourgeois enemies of the people!" Louie growled as I walked next to him trying to hear him over the wind blowing across 23rd Street.

"Look at them!" He was jabbing his index finger in the direction of the passersby. "What do they know of the struggle of the proletariat?" He stopped in front of the Walgreens and pointed at me.

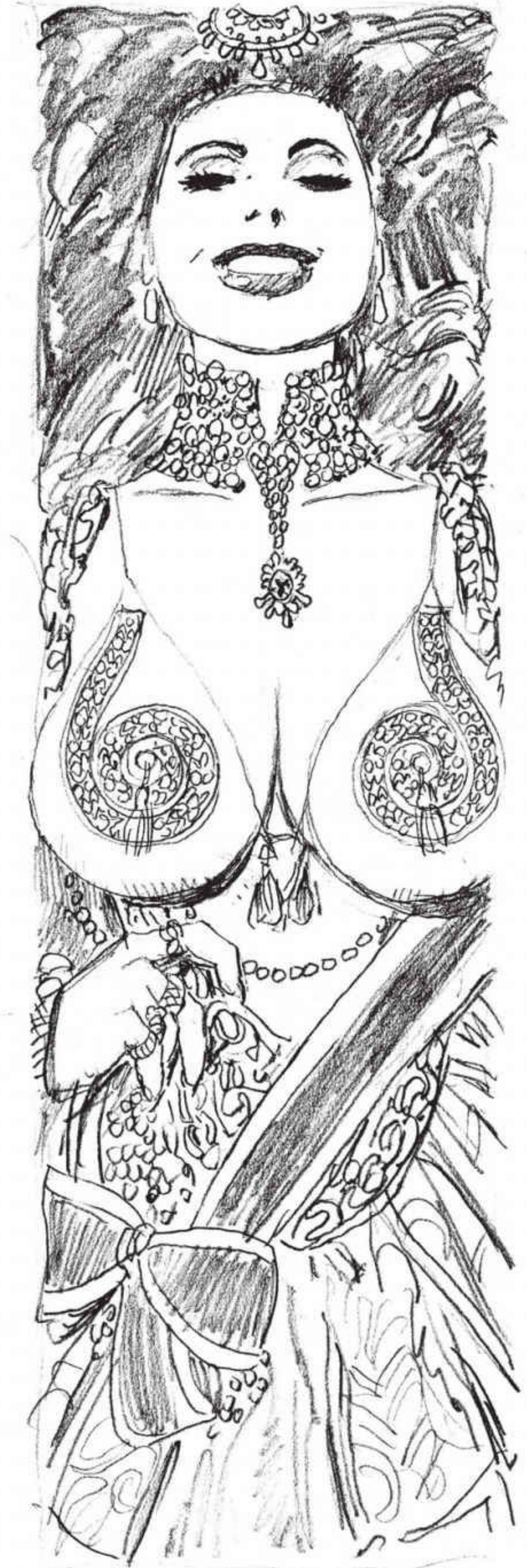
"You want to be a cartoonist, so tomorrow after school you come to my studio on 14th. Do you like Chinese food?"

Union Square was a short walk from the Flatiron. Louie's suite was on the second floor of the building across from Klein's, where generations got a square deal. The inside of Fierstein's studio was like the dusky paint deck of the old Metropolitan Opera. He painted on a heroic scale, and the canvasses were stored in racks that soared two stories up into the shadows.

The wall at the end of the room was dominated by a huge full-length self portrait by Louie as Tsar Ivan the Terrible. And it *was* terrible. A full-figure catastrophe that ranked with the siege of Leningrad. Louie's tiny head was sitting on the shoulders of a colossal body surrounded by tacky scenes of Ivan's ruthless conquests.

"Ivan is the favorite of the Russian masses," Louie proclaimed. "Alexei Tolstoy, the greatest writer in the Soviet Union, is preparing two plays. Two! On his life and times." He ruffled through a stack of movie stills. "Of course you've seen Eisensteins's film. His masterpiece!"

Bluffing, I shook my head enthusiastically like I'd seen it four times at the Rahway Theater. For all I knew, Jon Hall and Maria Montez might have played the Tsar and Tsarina.





I heard kitchen noises coming from an isle between the canvas canyons. I was dumb on Eisenstein, but I knew the odor of Chow Har Ding. Out from the corridor came Bonnie, her bountiful breasts stuffed into a skimpy gold lame top, while her fabulous buns were barely covered by a minimal art nouveau G-string. It had to be the costume of Taia, the girlfriend of Ibis, owner of the wooden Superman.

"Hi, Thorney," she chirped. "Do you like Sum Gup Dai? We have egg rolls and hot and sour soup, too. Then we'll get started."

I was wrong about the Chow Har Ding, but right about Taia. I was to pencil Bonnie in her sexpot suit for the cover of the February issue of Ibis The Invincible, my first job in the comic book business. As a droplet of ginger sauce stood poised on her chin, I wondered if she knew of Hy's contraband photos.

"I loved the drawing you made of me as Dale Arden in Larry's class."

Dale was Flash Gordon's sweet momma, and like Taia, of wasp-waist and ample bosom.

Ibis, the poor man's Mandrake the Magician, and his conjuring rod were forever in mighty combat with vampires, werewolves, and winged demons. The succulent bait for the adolescent male reader was always Taia. I was to draw her in the clutches of an evil sorcerer preparing her for yet another human sacrifice. Louie, in his rough layout, indicated she was to be surrounded by rotting corpses and other assorted necrophilic claptrap.

With Ivan Dzerzhinsky's opera *Blood of the People* booming from Louie's Philco, I posed Bonnie with the help of a metal stool and a cardboard box.

"Daddy, turn it down," she pleaded. "Give us a break!" 'Daddy!?' Was she Louie's daughter?

Or was it like her heart belongs to 'Daddy?' Could the old sonofabitch be fooling around with a twenty-four year old? Could Louie, the moldy Marxist, who hadn't sold one of his crappy paintings in five years, be intimate with this gorgeous creature?

New York, New York, it's a wonderful town — the Bronx is up, and the Battery's down...

"Bigger knockers, comrade! And this corpse reaching for her ass, make him look like Hitler."

Louie was critiquing my pencil drawing.

The war was over, but they were still fighting Hitler in the comic books.

"Even a dead Hitler on the cover increases sales!" Louie proclaimed. "The issue with Hitler on the moon sold almost as well as Hitler battling the specially trained U.S. battalion of dinosaurs — all T-Rex's!"

It was Bonnie's turn for a critique. "Hey, wow! Neat! That's me! Where did you learn to draw women like that?"

"I owe it all to Maggie Burke, my high school art teacher. She got me into Art Career School."

"Was she sexy?" Bonnie asked.

"Think of Maria Montez," I responded.

Actually, Olive Oyl would have been a closer match.

"Did you ever sleep with her?"

To be truthful, the only female I'd ever slept with was my rat terrier. "She's married," I rejoined.

"Why, Thorney, you're blushing! I bet you're still a virgin!"

I started making the changes. By the time I was finished I'd added a decaying Tojo and a mildewed Mussolini to the design.



I was about to hike up Broadway and catch the 12:20 at Penn Station when Bonnie bounced out of the kitchen. "Thorney, you forgot your fortune cookie." She had doffed the Taia costume and was naked under an open art nouveau robe that would have scandalized Salome. "I've been meaning to ask you, why do you always wear your pajamas to school?"

A minor eccentricity, I tried wearing them in Rahway High, and went full-time in art school.

"They're from Palestine, my uncle brought them back for me," I replied.

"Palestine will soon be the State of Israel," Louie remarked as he finished up the Sum Gup Dai. "Your uncle — is he Jewish?"

"Maybe," I answered.

"I never heard of a 'maybe Jew,'" Louie allowed. "Either you're Jewish or you're not Jewish. So what's a 'maybe Jew' doing in Palestine?"

"He went there as a hairdresser."

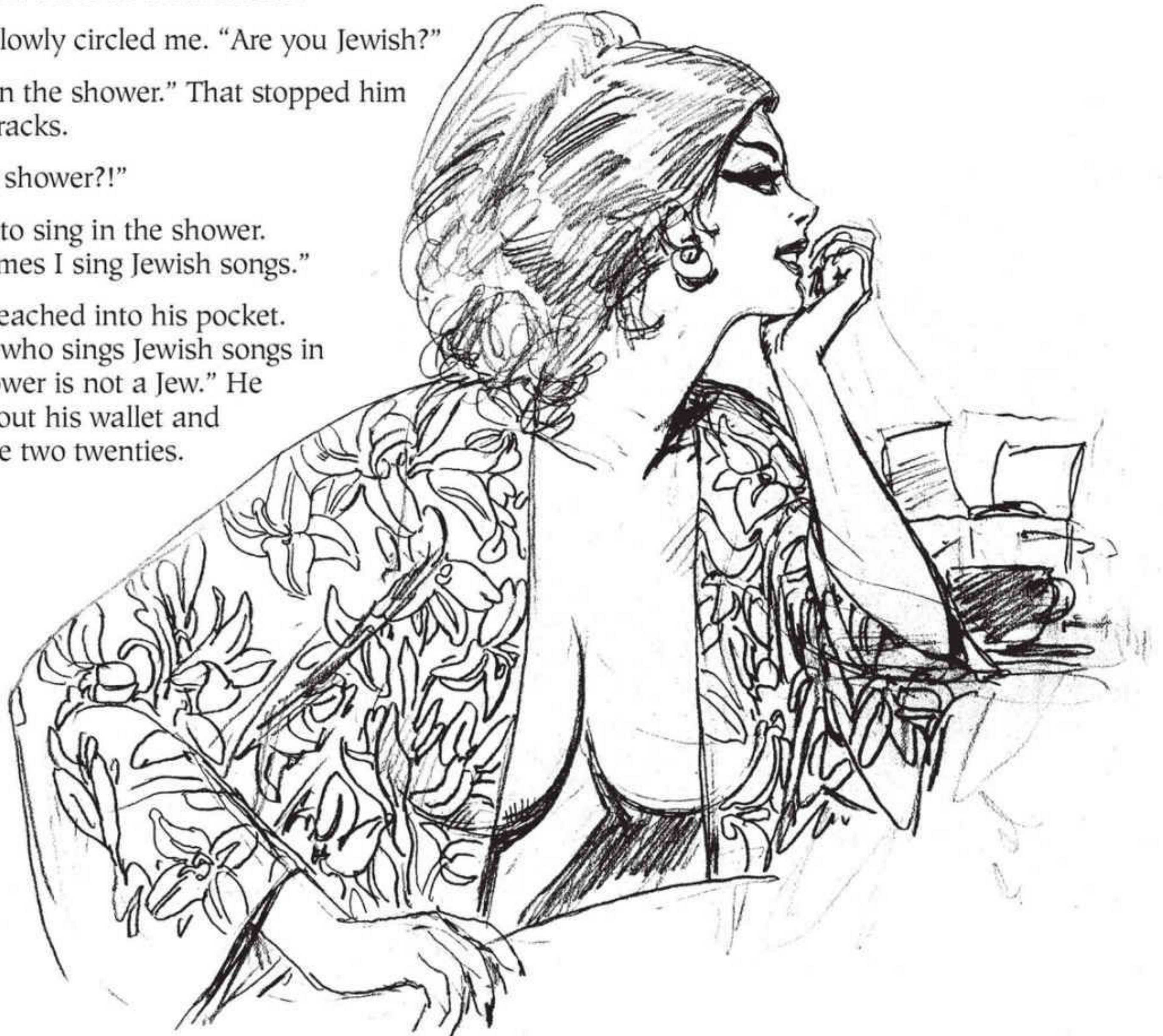
Louie slowly circled me. "Are you Jewish?"

"Only in the shower." That stopped him in his tracks.

"In the shower?!"

"I love to sing in the shower. Sometimes I sing Jewish songs."

Louie reached into his pocket. "A goy who sings Jewish songs in the shower is not a Jew." He pulled out his wallet and gave me two twenties.



Nodding off on the way back to Rahway, I was thinking about Collie. He was born an Episcopalian then converted to Catholicism, and was a Vendanta Buddhist for a while. Later he embraced Bahaism. For a brief time, he was a follower of Father Divine. It could be that somewhere along the line he might have converted to Judaism.

Fumbling to find my ticket I found the fortune cookie. I cracked it open. The message read:

The city stalks a country mouse like a hungry cat.

Next morning, Larry was doing his best to salvage nine muddy product renderings. "Think of it as erotic — an alluring irresistible pleasure-filled object."

He was holding up a warm bottle of Ballantine's Ale. "Girls, this is Gregory Peck. Boys, this is Lana Turner."

Each of us had been struggling for three weeks on a full-color tempera painting of the demon bottle for an ad concept.

"It should be sweating like an ice pitcher," Larry continued, "with luscious droplets of moisture running down the neck and onto the label."

Mine looked like a dead carp.

Later Charlie and I were eating our lunch out on the parapet. Across Broadway was a building almost as tall as the Flatiron. Two display painters on a scaffold had just begun work on a sign.

"Looks like it's going to be a Pennzoil ad," Charlie observed as he worked on a ham and cheese on a sesame bun.

Whatever it was, the top was green. The following day we knew. They finished by Friday. In three days the two guys had painted an alluring, irresistible eighty-foot high bottle of Ballantine's Ale, complete with twenty-foot long luscious droplets of moisture.





The last semester was winding down when Louie came bounding up to me in the hall outside Miss Ellison's office.

"Comrade, today after school, we go together to publisher on 52nd. Bring portfolio. No bottles. Just ladies."

The Gramercy chimes on the Met building were sounding 3:15 as we walked down the steps to the BMT.

"Today we meet Barrow Sloman," Louie announced. "He publishes *Keyhole*."

To the Marvels, *Keyhole* was the grail itself. The mother lode! Home to Lois De Fee and Tempest Storm. The *Keyhole* building — a golden temple fit for Ming The Merciless! The Sistine Chapel with perfumed chambers.

"Sloman is a slob," Louie growled. "An insensitive brute. For two years I've been trying to sell him a comic for his filthy rag."

We were coming out into the sunlight on 53rd. "You draw. I write and ink, but we split fifty-fifty. The rate is much better than in comic books. OK?"

"Yeah. Sure," I agreed. "I thought we were going to Fawcett, you know, Ibis."

Louie stopped. I stopped.

"Fawcett...a farshtinkener gang of thieves and running dogs!" He poked my chest with his stubby finger. "This whole business is farshtinkener!"

Waiting at the entrance was luscious Bonnie, wearing a fiery red skin tight top and shorts to match.

"Hey Thorney!" she shouted. "Come on, let's sell this bastard our comic strip!"

Hardly a temple, the building was a putrid gray art deco ruin. The elevator was even worse. At the end of a long dusky hall was 3C. A small hand-lettered sign read 'I.D. Publications. No Solicitors.' The solicitors entered: A dumpy Bolshevik with a brief case, a hot tomato, and a kid in pajamas with a portfolio.

A fat lady with bad teeth was sitting at a small cluttered desk next to the door.

"We're here for Barrow," said Louie.

She took another puff on her Old Gold, looked up and slowly panned, stopping at me. She stared me up and down. I thought maybe my fly was open, but I didn't have one. Then she gestured toward a rusting water cooler in the corner.

"The door, over there."

"Barrow, my good friend," Louie said as he pumped Sloman's hand. "Bonnie you know, but let me introduce you to the next Alex Raymond!"

I shook Sloman's hand. He was a bear of a man, with two day's growth of beard and a wen the size of a Ping-Pong ball hovering over his left eye.





Louie grabbed my portfolio and plopped it down on Sloman's desk. Barrow started flipping through.

"Nice tits. I can tell it's Bonnie." He looked up at me. "Do you know Eneg's stuff?"

"I..."

"A great artist. He works for Irving," he continued.

Eneg I'd never heard of, but figured "Irving" was Irving Klaw, the bondage czar of 14th Street. Bonnie leaned over Sloman's shoulder with her very large array pulsing next to the wen.

"He'd be perfect for ..."

Bonnie was revving up for the pitch.

"Eneg!" Sloman roared triumphantly, "It's Gene spelled backwards!"

"...Jugsy Malone!" Bonnie finally got it out.

Barrow was up on his feet. "Kid, you're looking at the most powerful force on the planet." He was standing next to Bonnie rotating her as if she was a side of beef in an abattoir.

"Look at that ass! Those tits! That's what it's all about!" Bonnie had assumed her Betty Boop pose. Then he grabbed her breasts and massaged them with ferocious glee.

Louie was right. Sloman was a slob, but bountiful Bonnie didn't mind a bit. Barrow released the undulating globes and cupped his hands around his nose. He took a long deep breath.

"We've got a deal. Jugsy starts in the November issue."

The Three Sisters

At the furthest reaches of the sea a tropical paradise lies floating in the warm Caribbean...

"Chinoiserie, the motif is definitely 18th-century European." Eve Hotchkiss had the window seat and was doing a boisterous analysis of the cloud formations at twenty-thousand feet.

"Quattrocento, no...cinquecento!" protested Simone Gittleman who was sitting next to her.

I was on the isle. Eve was the premier interior decorator for Koos Brothers, Rahway's famous upscale furniture store. Simone, raconteur extraordinaire, was also the middleman between Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, the ruthless dictator of the Dominican Republic and the Brothers Koos.

Eve and Simone were on their way to Ciudad Trujillo to bid on the contract to furnish the generalissimo's summer palace at San Cristobal under construction in the dazzling high country outside the city. My job was to sketch the empty rooms as they would look arrayed with Koos' furnishings.

From where I was sitting the cumulus clouds reminded me of Bonnie. It was a week after the deal was set for Jugsy, and I had already finished the first story. My brother worked at Koos and had suggested me for the assignment. Bertie was delighted to give me a two-week leave-of-absence from school.

After a six hour flight we left the Super Constellation at Miami and landed in the Dominican in a wobbly DC7. A limo picked us up at the airport and we were whisked to the Caribe Hotel through streets peppered with statues of the pretentious General.



That evening, still pondering my awkward introduction to guacamole by Simone, I left the hotel dining pavilion and drifted into the ballroom.

"Not as good as Harry James, but we have other bands that are superior. Buenas tardas, Senór Thorne, my name is Lissa."

She stepped to my side. "They're better than Harry James." I observed.

We were standing at the edge of the dance floor listening to the Caribe's Afro-Cuban house band rip through a spectacular version of the Peanut Vendor.

"The music downtown is superior to this, also the food. *Te invito a una copa.*" She gestured toward the cocktail lounge. I nodded my head and followed her. I'd passed my first Spanish test.

Lissa Strothmans was our appointed guide. She was taller and more slender than Bonnie, and would have been miscast as Jugsy Malone. Lissa was a perfect Miss Fury, with a cascade of jet black hair that reached down her back.

"Tomorrow we drive to San Cristobal. The accommodations at the El Presidente are smaller but very good also."

My Coke and I followed Lissa to the terrace overlooking the beach. "*Fumas?*" She said as she flashed a pack of Lucky Strikes.

"No thanks," I answered, "but I'm thinking about taking up pipe smoking."

A thunderhead illuminated by lightening blossomed on the horizon. "*— Que bonito!*" Lissa noted.



In the torch light I saw a young woman waving at me. I waved back. In an instant the hot tamale was standing next to me.

"Eres muy sexy. Quiero hacer el amor contigo." cooed the tamale.

Lissa wheeled around, *"— Vamos!"* she growled. *"— Voy a llamar a la policia!"*

The tamale flipped her the bird and stalked off.

"Francisco," Lissa noted, "Whatever condition you came down here in, you're going back the same." Actually, Lissa Strothmans was a hotter tamale than the tamale.

And saw above me, fold on fold, gray to pearl and pearl to gold, this visage like a land of old, the land of Eldorado...

The Generalissimo's summer palace was set on the heights overlooking the Najayo Valley, eighteen miles from the city. Lissa pointed it out as the limo pulled up to the El Presidente. The palace was a perfect Mongo for an Hispanic Ming the Merciless.

"A Silver Wraith!" Eve remarked as she gawked at a Rolls parked nearby.

"Is Trujillo in the Presidential Suite?"

Lissa shook her head. "No, Senóra Hotchkiss, if he were here there would be everywhere police. The silver Rolls is for only La Tres Hermanas."

I failed my second Spanish test, but Simone gave me a lecherous wink.

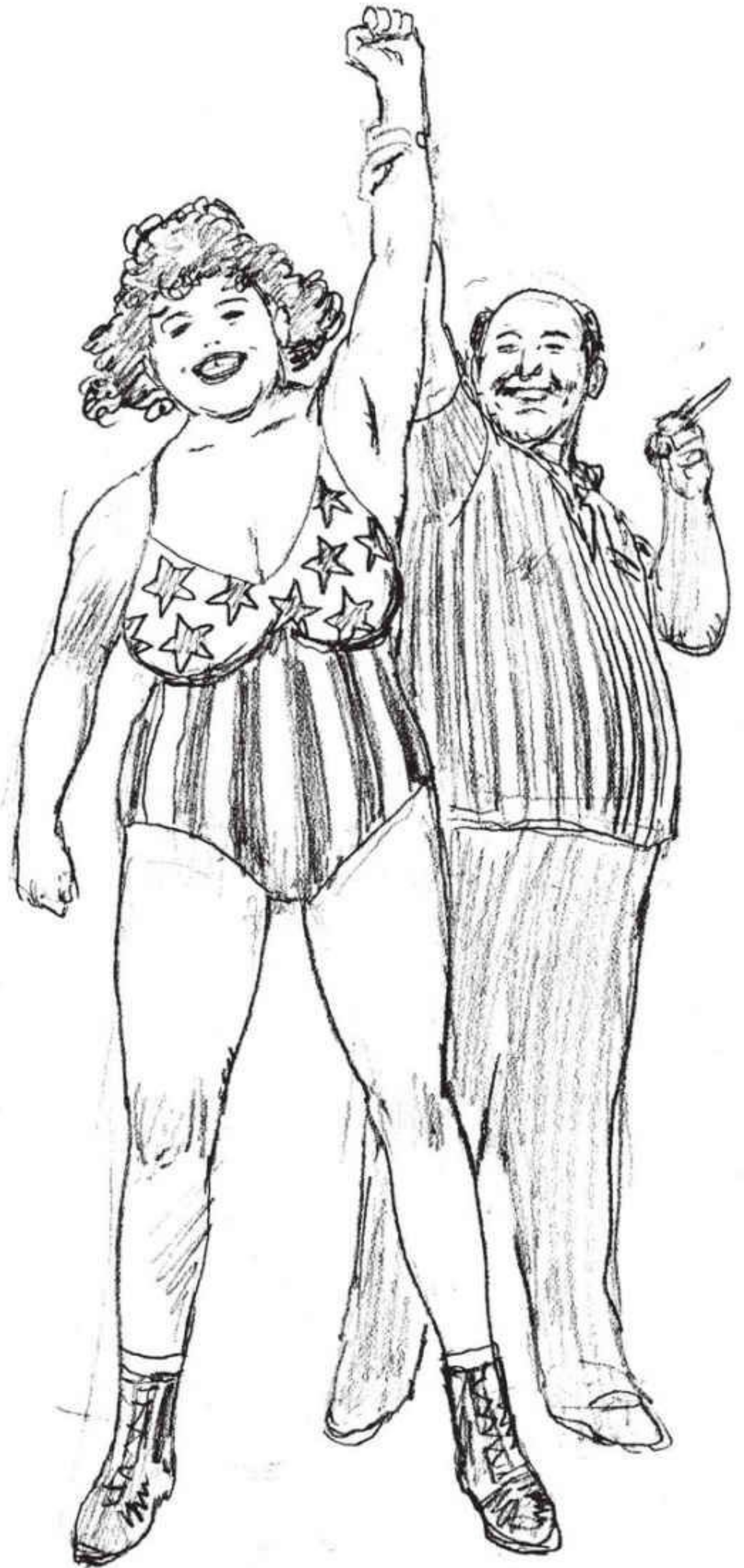
My room overlooked a sizable Pompeian pool girdled by swirling mosaics and marble statuary. With my gear stowed I took the elevator down to the first floor. Eve was critiquing the lobby for Simone.

"Magnifique! The sgraffito-work rivals the Hall dell' Orologia in the Palazzo Vecchio."

All that from a lady who looked like a female wrestler with too much pancake makeup. Eve was alluring even so. She reminded me of Mae Weston, the prima donna of maidenly maulers.

Simone spotted me and the three of us ambled out onto the veranda. "Over there," Simone nodded toward the pool. "La Tres Herminas."

Lolling near the pool were three ladies with their bare appurtenances reaching for the noonday sun.



"*Mucho bonito señoritas!*" I blurted. "How's my Spanish?"

Simone ignited a stogy the size of a Bratwurst. "Terrible, but you're learning."

In fact, Simone reminded me of a very large Bratwurst in a double-breasted suit. He used the stogy as a pointer.

"Conchita on the left, in the middle Melisenda, and next to her Lolita: La Tres Hermanas, the three sisters who are not sisters."

Feeling that I had been educated enough for our first day in San Cristobal, Simone suggested we take a ride to the palace.

With Lissa at the wheel we drove a route of stunning beauty that rose to the highlands above the valley. El Presidente's summer residence was near completion. We walked past swarms of workers and entered through a great marble colonnade.

"This, *el paseo*, and through here, *la sala*."

Lissa was taking us into an enormous empty living room. Beyond was the banquet hall, barren of furnishings. Lissa paused at the top of the wide marble stairs.

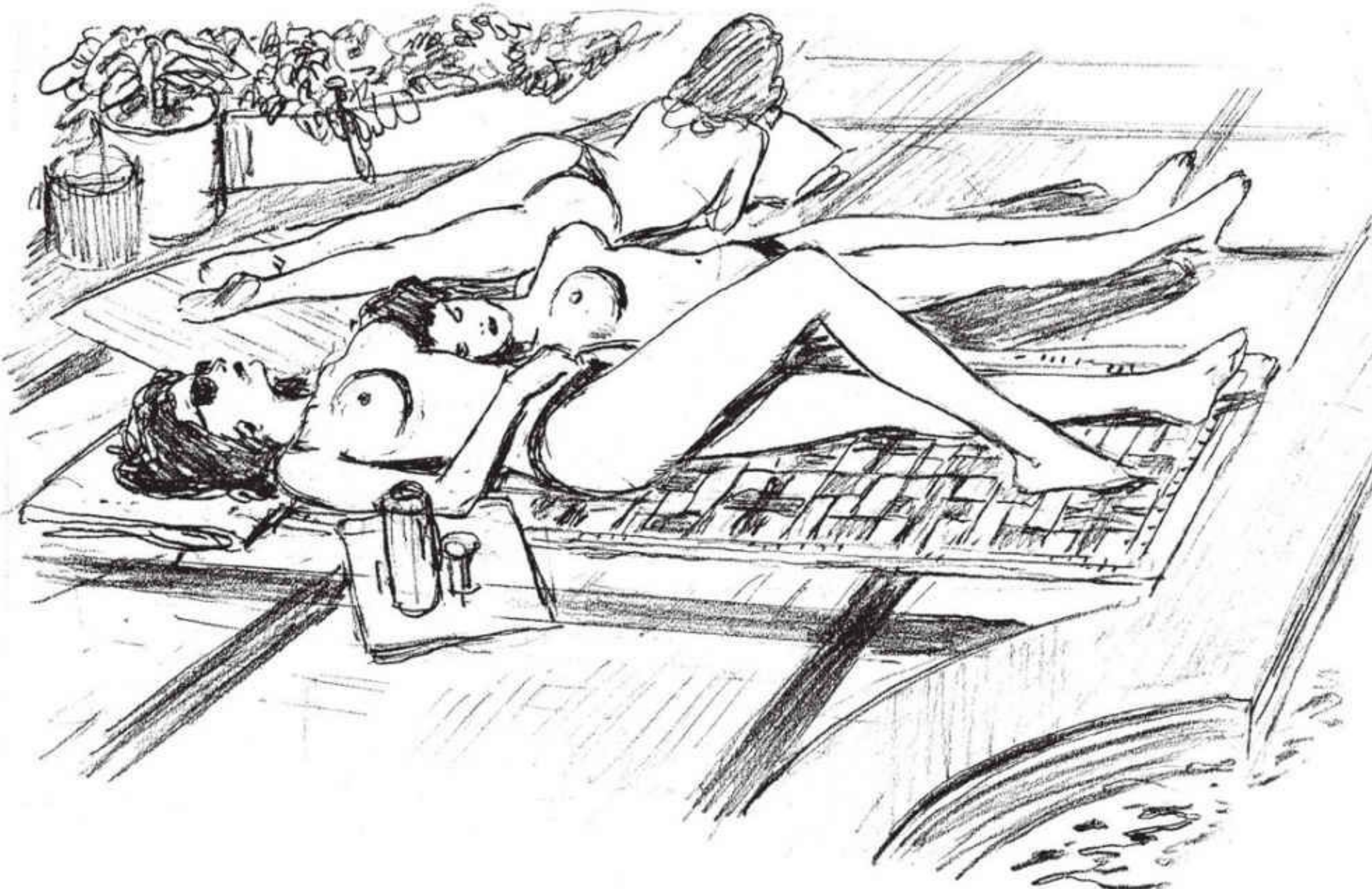
"And here, very important, *la cama* — El Presidente's bedroom."

While Lissa was showing Eve a bathroom that would have delighted Caligula, Simone and I wandered into the capacious bedroom.

"Here sketch a wide drape. It must conceal the *amor portiere*." He pointed to a door on the South wall. "*Comprendo?*"

I was very much non-comprendo. Simone lowered his voice.

"Come."



He opened the door leading to a stairway that cascaded downward into darkness. "The Three Sisters will use this stairway, not all at the same time, to entertain El Presidente."

Simone furtively made a circle with his thumb and forefinger and with the other hand pumped his stogy in and out of the aperture. "*Follarte!*" he whispered. It needed no translation.

Farewell the tranquil mind; farewell content; farewell the plume of innocence...

The Rolls was gone when we pulled up at the hotel. After dinner a swim, then a long sleepless night. Mesilenda...Conchita...Lolita...they were every eighteen-year-old male's moist fantasy. It was the first time I ever let a fan run all night. The closest thing to La Tres Hermanas in Rahway were the Locher twins, who went skinny-dipping in Milton Lake one summer. At least that's what Jimmy Decker said.

The next morning Lissa was flipping through some of my sketches. "Very nice. Señor Gittleman, is he pleased?"

"These are pencil roughs, he hasn't seen them."

Lissa was wearing the mother of all bikinis. When it got too hot I moved the board pool-side. "I have to color..."

"Would you make a sketch of me?" she interrupted. "I will pay 50 pesos."

I agreed, but refused the money. The drawing came out looking more like Lolita, but she loved it.

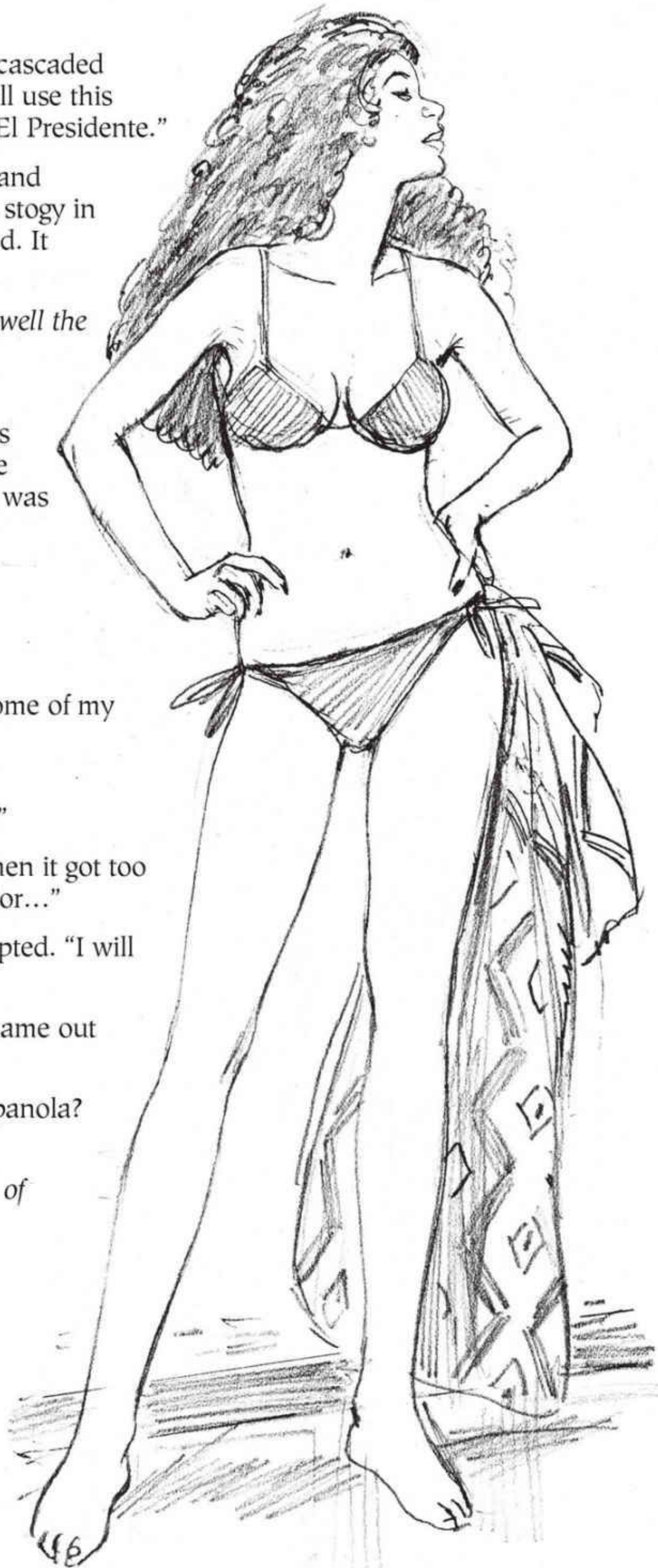
"Did you know that Maria Montez is from Hispanola? She was born here in San Cristóbal."

"Maria Montez?" I spouted. "She was in *South of Tahiti*."

Lissa continued "Did you see it?"

I shook my head. "Was she ever in a Sheena movie?"

Lissa shook her head. "No, Francisco, I have not heard of such a movie. She was very beautiful. We were all so proud of her when she went to Hollywood. It was a sad, short life."



I didn't have the nerve to tell Lissa Strothmans that Maria Montez was in my backyard, in Rahway New Jersey, sitting on the running board of our '33 Chevy.

The next day we were returning from the Palace when Lissa looked in the rear view mirror and pulled onto the shoulder of the road.

"It is Trujillo." She announced. Then we heard the sirens. First the motorcycles, then a Russian-made armored Ziss limo, followed by the Silver Wraith, and two more black limos. The cortege sped by and disappeared in the direction of the Presidente Hotel.

A few minutes later a bodyguard directed us to a parking place in the hotel lot. Other armed thugs were stationed at the corners, and I could see one on the roof. They were dressed like *The Blackhawks* from Military Comics.

"¡Cono! Vaya problema." Lissa took off her sunglasses and was eyeballing the goon squad. "The Generalissimo will be staying in the Presidential Suite on the top floor. Do not take the elevator there."

Simone was ecstatic. "¡Oué bien! I met him in Monte Carlo only last year. Together we ate live baby eel soup at the Rouge Sauterelle."

"And I'm Ethel Merman!" Eve snorted as we entered the lobby. In fact, Eve could have been a sensation as the wrestling Ethel Merman.

Simone caught me by the elevator. "Now that you're a world traveler, let me tell you something about Eve Hotchkiss." I was only thinking about Melisenda, Conchita, and Lolita. "She's a lousy interior decorator, and a sexual predator." Suddenly I was thinking



only of Eve Hotchkiss. "Watch your ass," he concluded, as he trotted off to the bar. Back in my room I tried to sketch Eve in pasties and a G-string, but it didn't look the same as Tempest Storm. Meanwhile I checked the pool. There was no sign of El Presidente or The Sisters.

Lissa took Simone and Eve up to the palace in the morning, then returned to do the turista thing with me. Sitting beside her bouncing along in the front seat of the '46 Packard I figured she was at least the equal of any one of The Hermanas.

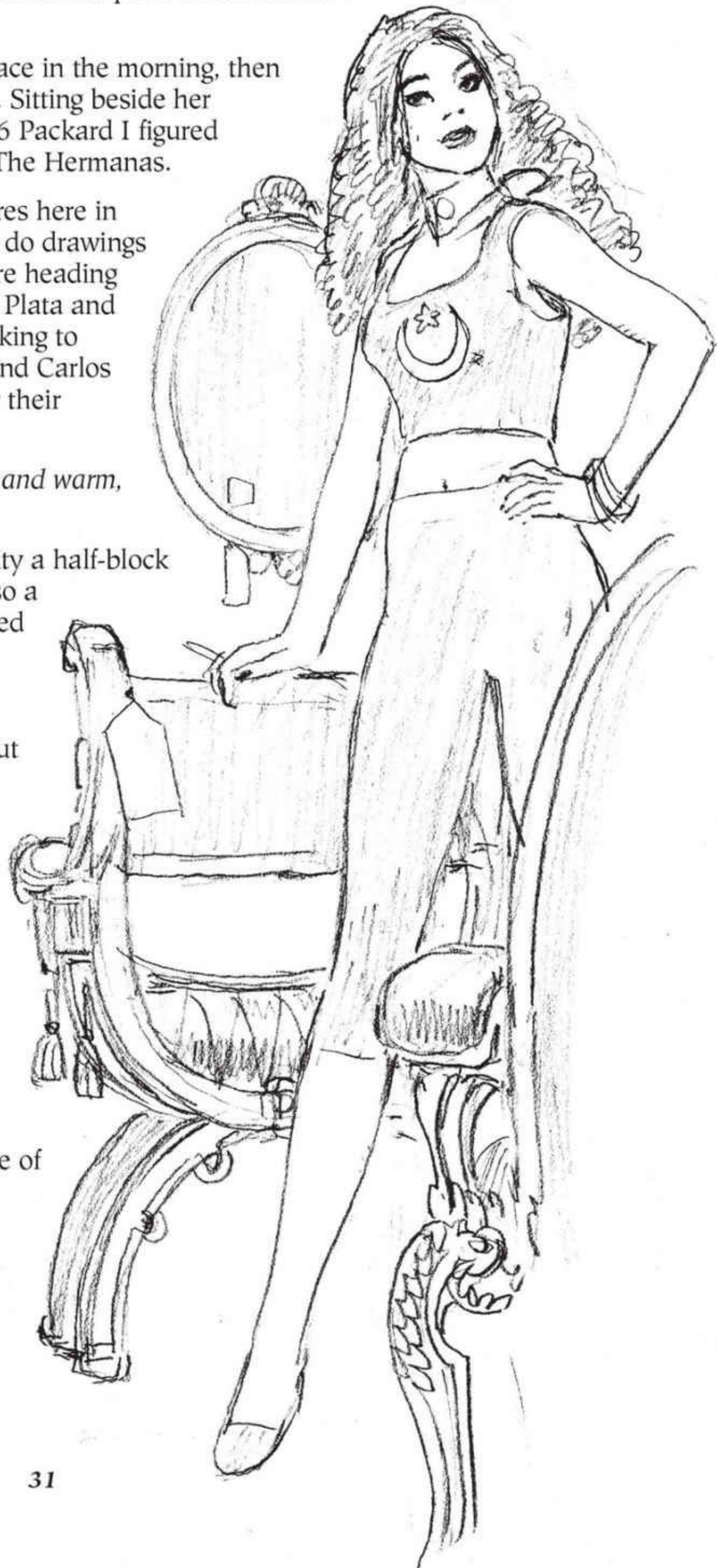
"Francisco, we have several furniture stores here in Ciudad Trujillo, but we have no artists to do drawings like you do for Senór Gittleman." We were heading through downtown on our way to Puerto Plata and the landing site of Columbus. "I am speaking to you on behalf of El Senórs Juan Garcia and Carlos Vasquez to offer you position as artist for their stores."

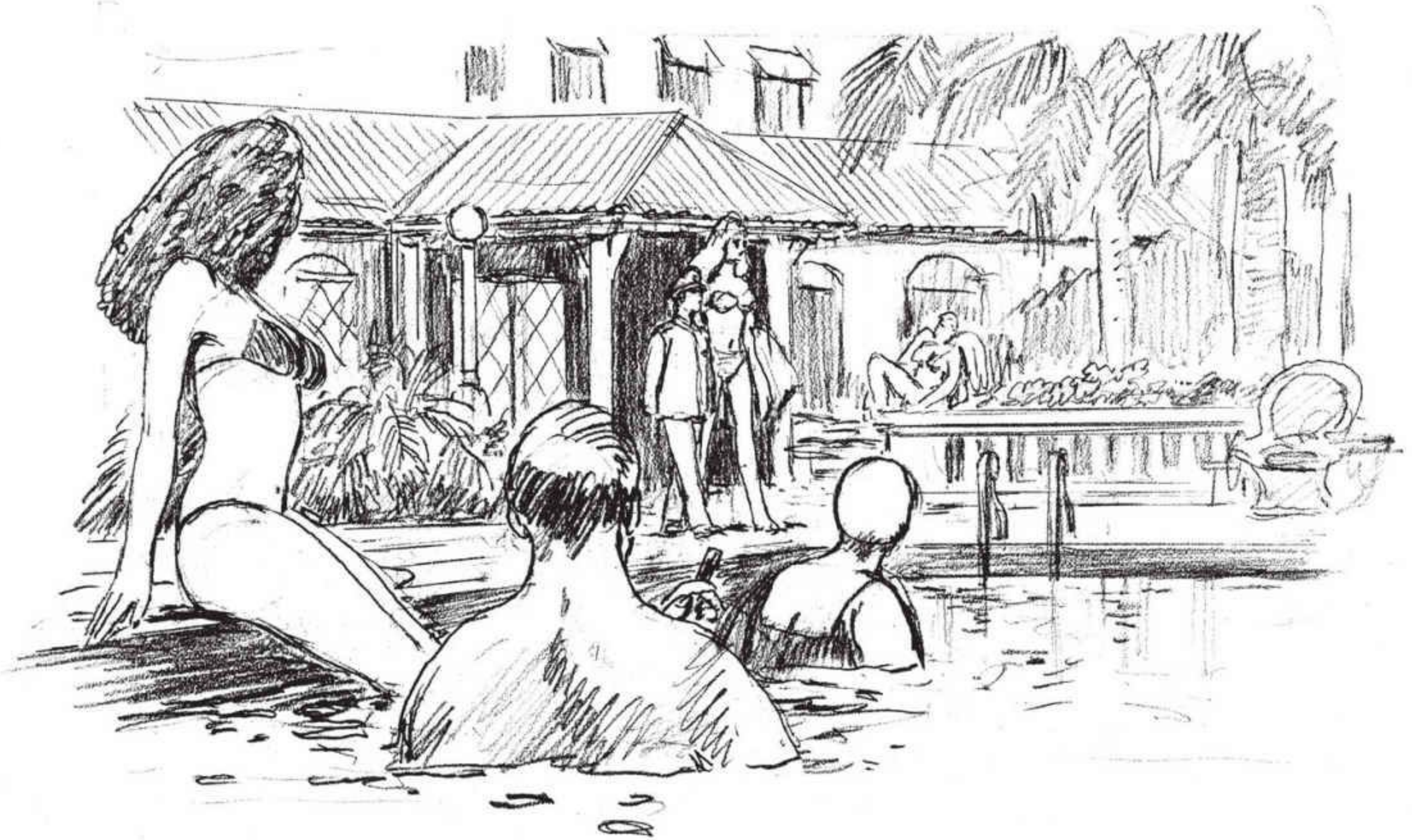
Try the tropics for your balm, try flesh soft and warm, try to resist Circe's call...

She parked in front of a stucco monstrosity a half-block long. "This is the main store, ahead is also a very good store, but smaller." Lissa insisted we cruise the showrooms. To draw a Chippendale was no problem, to identify one was another thing. Leaving Lissa gabbing with a salesman I drifted back out onto the sidewalk. A scruffy little kid sauntered up to me. He showed me a worn photo of a nude señorita.

"¿Te gusta mi hermana? Treinta y ocho pesos." He was all of nine. It wasn't the photo he was selling, and I knew what hermana meant. A peso went a long way in Hispaniola.

"No, er, *gracias*," I answered, and gave the little guy a quarter. He went bounding down the boulevard toward a portly tourist photographing a huge statue of El Presidente.





Heading out of town Lissa took the coast road to Puerto Plata. "The pay would be very good, I have assurances from Vasquez and Garcia." I wondered about that considering how far the peso went on the streets of Trujillo City. "They will also give you a very nice house." She was upping the ante.

"I have a girlfriend in America," I announced. "She plays the trombone."

Lissa giggled. "I do not play the trombone, but I will stay with you as *la querida* for as long as you like. When you no longer like, we give you another *querida* who can play the trombone. Think it over, Paco."

We arrived at the Columbus tree, which was clinging for dear life on the dunes at the edge of the Caribbean. "This tree is where Christopher Columbus tied the Nina," Lissa boasted. "In 1492. A long time ago, Paco." Could be that there once was a tree under all that concrete. It looked like it belonged on a *Krazy Kat* Sunday page.

Pool-side next morning I was looking up at the Presidential Suite wondering if The Sisters would be coming down for a dip. Across the pool there was an armed Blackhawk nodding off in the shadow of the marble statue of the three muses. Simone and Eve were in the water arguing. As usual, Simone was making his point with his cigar. I propped my board up against a wicker table and started a sketch of the muses.

"Hsst! Hsst!" Simone was trying to get my attention. "El Presidente!" he mouthed as he furtively pointed his cigar toward the veranda. A sudden gust of wind agitated the palms as if to honor the entrance of the Grand Pooh Bah.

Striding toward the pool, in full uniform, was Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. No sign of La Tres Hermanas, but sashaying next to him, a good two heads taller, was a stately blonde doing an entrance like Lois De Fee. Oddly, no bodyguards were evident except for the somnolent Blackhawk across the pool.

The pair sat down at the table next to me as a waiter scurried to their side to take their drink order. The blonde was wearing a hot two-piece bathing suit. The bottoms were blue and the top was red, and was cinched with a large metal replica of the Dominican Coat of Arms. She was a walking Dominican Republic flag with huge breasts.

"You're from the States. I can tell because nobody down here dresses like that," the golden-tressed tamale said as she sat down next to me. The Dominican motto was "*Dios, Patria y Libertad*." I could read it on the Coat of Arms.

"I'm from Phillie, where are you from?"

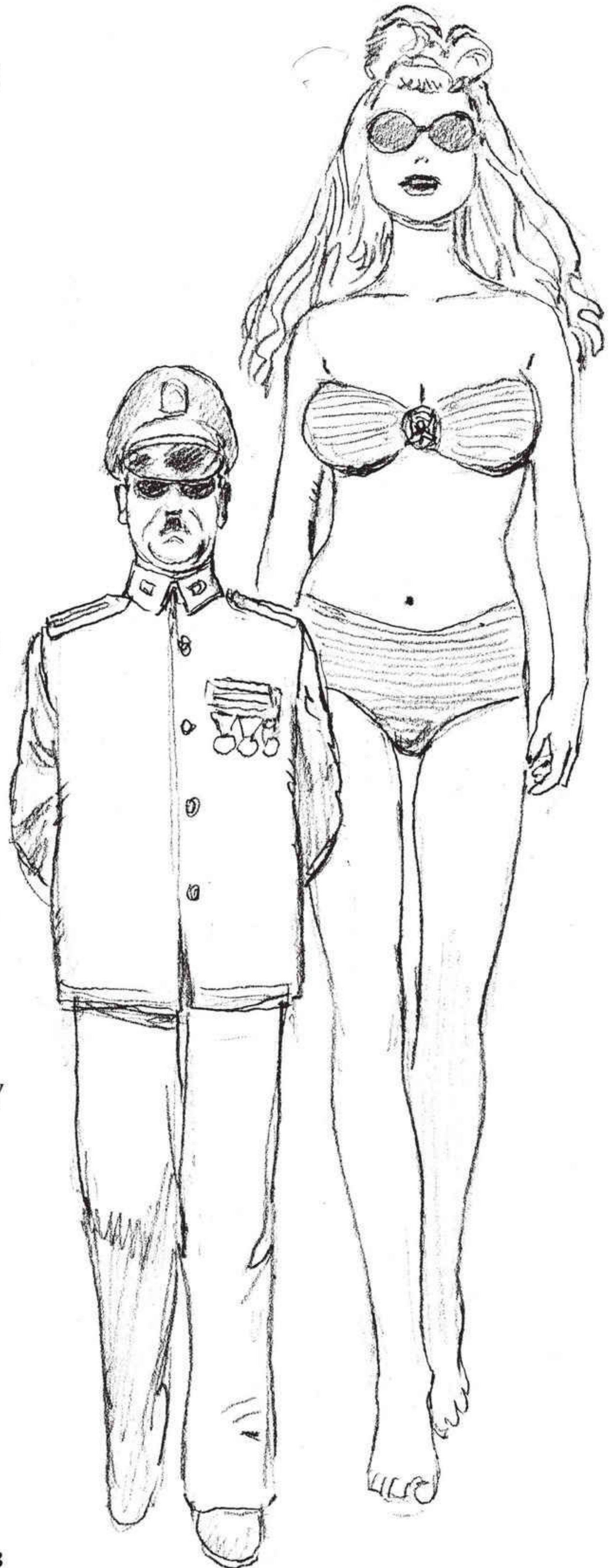
"Uhhh, ..." I gurgled.

"Don't let the Colonel rattle you," she advised. "He just wears the suit. Trujillio could be in Pittsburgh for all I know."

"I'm from Jersey, Rahway, New Jersey," I admitted.

"I danced at the Empire in Newark," she said. "Is that near Rahway?"

Decorously, I told the bombshell that Rahway was a few miles south of Newark, and I'd heard of the Empire Burlesque. Actually, Charlie, Hy, and I were regulars. Could I have been sitting next to Winnie Garret? Could she be Dagmar, or Maria Stinger?



"That's Hernando," whispered the pneumatic blonde as she glanced at the ersatz Presidente. "He's a real Colonel, and he has a long scar to prove it. It's on his back." The Colonel had no idea of what we were saying, but he shot us a wide, gap-toothed grin, and took another sip of his margarita. "He must have been running away and got nailed from behind with a bayonet," she continued. "Would you do a sketch of us?"

I agreed. It came out looking like Hitler sitting next to Lilly St. Cyr.

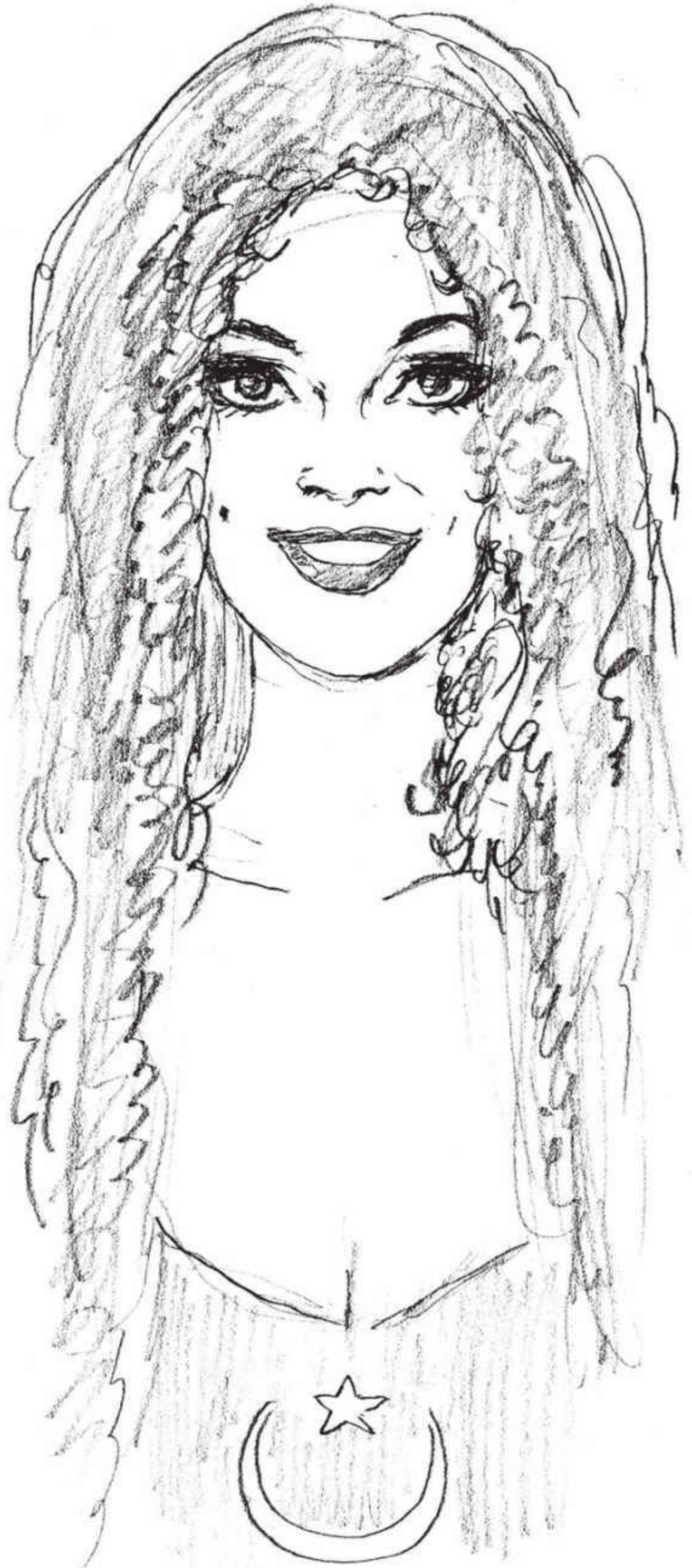
Adieu, kind friends adieu, I can no longer stay with you.

We were waiting in front of the hotel. Lissa was fetching the Packard. Eve was sitting on one of her suitcases.

"This time straight to Newark, no layover," Simone announced as he jogged toward us with his flight bag. "I just talked to Charlie Koos, the deal is set. They bought the whole package!" He grabbed me by the shoulder. "My artist! Have a cigar!"

It was my first cigar, a Cremo Supreme. Simone demonstrated how to bite off the tip. We fouled the Packard all the way to the airport, and Eve complained the whole time. After helping us with our luggage at Trujillio National, Lissa got me aside. "Unfortunately for us, Paco, you return to America in the same condition as when you came to Hispaniola." Then she gave me a wet Dominican smacker on the cheek.

I had the window seat on the way to Newark. Dancing on the wing were the La Tres Hermanas and Lissa Strothmans, the closest I ever came to having a *querida*.



Betty

Give my regards to Broadway, remember me to Herald Square, tell all the gang at Forty-second Street that I will soon be there...

"Thorney, you're going to love Irving. Sloman's an asshole. Irving's a sweetheart." Bonnie and I were heading down Broadway toward 14th Street. I was schlepping my portfolio trying to keep up with her while she prepped me for a meeting with Irving Klaw, the Grand Vizier of Bondage.

Three episodes of Jugsy had appeared in *Keyhole*. Louie's inking job over my drawings had spoiled the first two, so Sloman insisted I ink the third. It was a lot better, and Irving took notice.

"Do you think we should tell Louie?" I asked as we crossed Union Square.

"Fuck Louie," she hissed. "Let him stick to doing his shitty paintings."

Crouching under the Third Avenue El on 14th was the narrow storefront realm of Irving Klaw. His empire consisted of publishing and distributing an avalanche of classic bondage and soft-core material in books, movies and photographs. I followed Bonnie as she slapped open the door and strode past a long counter lined with a motley convocation of heavy-breathing connoisseurs of kink rifling through worn three-ring binders bulging with photos.



Irving's office was far down a corridor lined with filing cabinets and boxes piled to the ceiling. The bondage maven was sitting at a roll-top desk. On the wall beside him was a sizable nude photo of Maria Stinger. Luscious Maria's pubes had been crudely airbrushed over by one of Irv's retouching Michelangelos. At first I thought it was the Dominican Colonel's date, but Maria's were even bigger.

"My beautiful Bonnie!" Irving spouted as he popped up and gave Bonnie a hug. Irving looked like a waiter at Smith and Wollenskys.

"Thorney, this is Uncle Irv," Bonnie cooed.

Klaw smiled broadly as he shook my hand. "I have a surprise for you," he announced. "But that will come later. Sit."

Bonnie perched herself on the corner of Irving's desk and performed a slow motion leg cross. From where Irv was sitting he could see all the way to Inner Mongolia.

"Relax, Tormie, I'm a nice fella," Irving said with a broad grin.

"It's Thorne," Bonnie interrupted. "I call him Thorney."

Irving corrected himself and continued flipping through my portfolio, "I want you to do a bondage series for me, featuring two of my rising stars, Bonnie here, and Betty." I nodded. "You'll be working live and from photos."

I nodded.

"Great! Glorious!" he trumpeted. "I will arrange a shooting session, this week, at the Chelsea Hotel on 23rd."



"Give him top rate," said a black man standing in the doorway wearing a beret. He was looking at me. "Hey man, you wearing pajamas! That's cool."

"Come! Thorney, meet Gene. Gene, meet Thorney." Irving was standing between us urging us to shake hands. "Bonnie! You see this? Forget Vargas. Petty is a pip-squeak!"

I was meeting ENEG, an artist so famous that Barrow would kill to get him away from Irving, and I'd never heard of him. Being from the boondocks had its disadvantages.

Rahway in the late '40s might as well have been Outer Mongolia. The hottest items on Harry Ducoff's newsstand were *Titter*, *Peep Show*, and *Keyhole*. Harry would sell them to the Marvels if we were alone in the store. He sold 8mm stag reels as well, because Johnny Sprovack's father was a regular customer. Johnny said his father kept his collection in the cellar behind the furnace. Fudder and I snuck down there once but couldn't find anything behind the furnace but a copy of *The National Geographic* with pictures of a bunch of African ladies wearing nothing but chammy G-strings.

I was starting in the bondage game and faking it. ENEG might as well have been Paul Robeson as far as I knew. Whoever he was, ENEG loved Jugsy Malone, and was salivating over beautiful Bonnie. Bonnie loved anybody who could further her beautiful career, and I loved to draw beautiful ladies. The combo *achevé*.

When I finally saw some of ENEG's drawings I thought it was Louie's stuff. I gave Louie a book of his drawings for his birthday. He looked through it. "Tsutcheppenish!" he hissed. "But thanks anyhow."

For Christmas Louie gave me a copy of *The Shadow of the Vulture* by Robert E. Howard. It was my introduction to Red Sonja, the medieval warrior woman, and it wasn't tsutcheppenish, whatever that meant.



Charlie Long knew Eneg's stuff, and all about Maria Stinger as well.

"Christ Boomer, why didn't you tell me you were going to Klaw's?" Charlie called me 'Boomer.' Everybody else in art school called me 'Thorney.' I did tell him that I was going to the Chelsea for a photo shoot with Bonnie and Betty.

"Betty Page?!" He groaned.

I told him Irving said her name was Betty, that's all I knew. Charlie was hyperventilating.

"If it's Irving Klaw, and if it's bondage and it's 'Betty,' it's got to be Betty Page!" He dug into his paint box and pulled out a photo of a raven-haired tomato with bangs, and a rubber ball strapped in her mouth. I invited Charlie to come along with me on the shoot.

Because of its lure, the students from school would sketch the old Chelsea. The ghosts of Lilly Langtry and Sarah Bernhardt wandered its halls, and the bar was a favorite hangout for the famous and the infamous of Manhattan. Christmas decorations were still up along 23rd Street as we approached.

"Klaw told me seven. We're early."

"So is Bonnie," Charlie noted as he spotted her under the marquee.

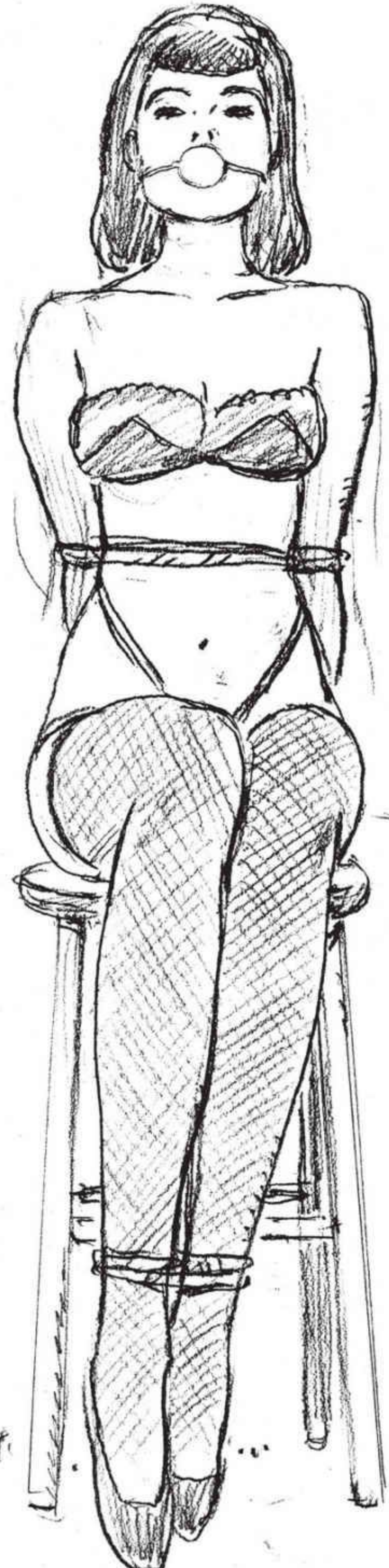
"You brought Charlie! Hi, Charlie," Bonnie cooed as she gave him a kiss on the cheek.

Charlie Long was a ringer for the young Jonathan Winters.

"Is Betty here yet?" Charlie asked as he wiped off the lipstick.

"That bitch!" Bonnie turned and stalked into the lobby. We followed her to the elevator. "They all say sugar wouldn't melt in her mouth, but I know better. 'Southern Belle.' 'Girl next door.' That's bullshit!"

The door to room 830 was ajar. As we entered Irving was nattering to a photographer about the lack of civility on the BMT.



Bonnie smooched Irving and started to undress.

Klaw spotted Charlie as he was shutting the door. "So who's this, Jonathan Winters?"

Bonnie's boobs were airborne. "That's him, Irv," she said as she wiggled out of her panties.

"Stop tchepping me! If he's Winters, he's Salvador Dali!"

Irving was pointing at the photographer, who resembled the crazy Catalan.

"Jonny's my new boyfriend, aren't you, Jonny?" Bonnie said, as she winked at Charlie.

"I shot Jinx Falkenburg with this camera," boasted Vinny, the Dali double, as he showed me his Series B Graflex. "Also Joan Crawford," he concluded.

The door buzzer sounded as Charlie was lacing up Bonnie in a leather corset. Irving was unpacking a large satchel filled with bondage paraphernalia.

"Must be Betty. Thorney, get the door."

It was the fabled brunette.

"Come here," she whispered.

I stepped into the hall beside her. She was shorter than she appeared in her photos. Her lustrous creamy-white skin glowed in the half-light.

"Over there." She was pointing at Room 831. "That's where Thomas Wolfe wrote 'Look Homeward Angel.'"

She went over and slowly ran her finger across the door. "Oliver Gant was born in there. I'm Betty, who are you?"

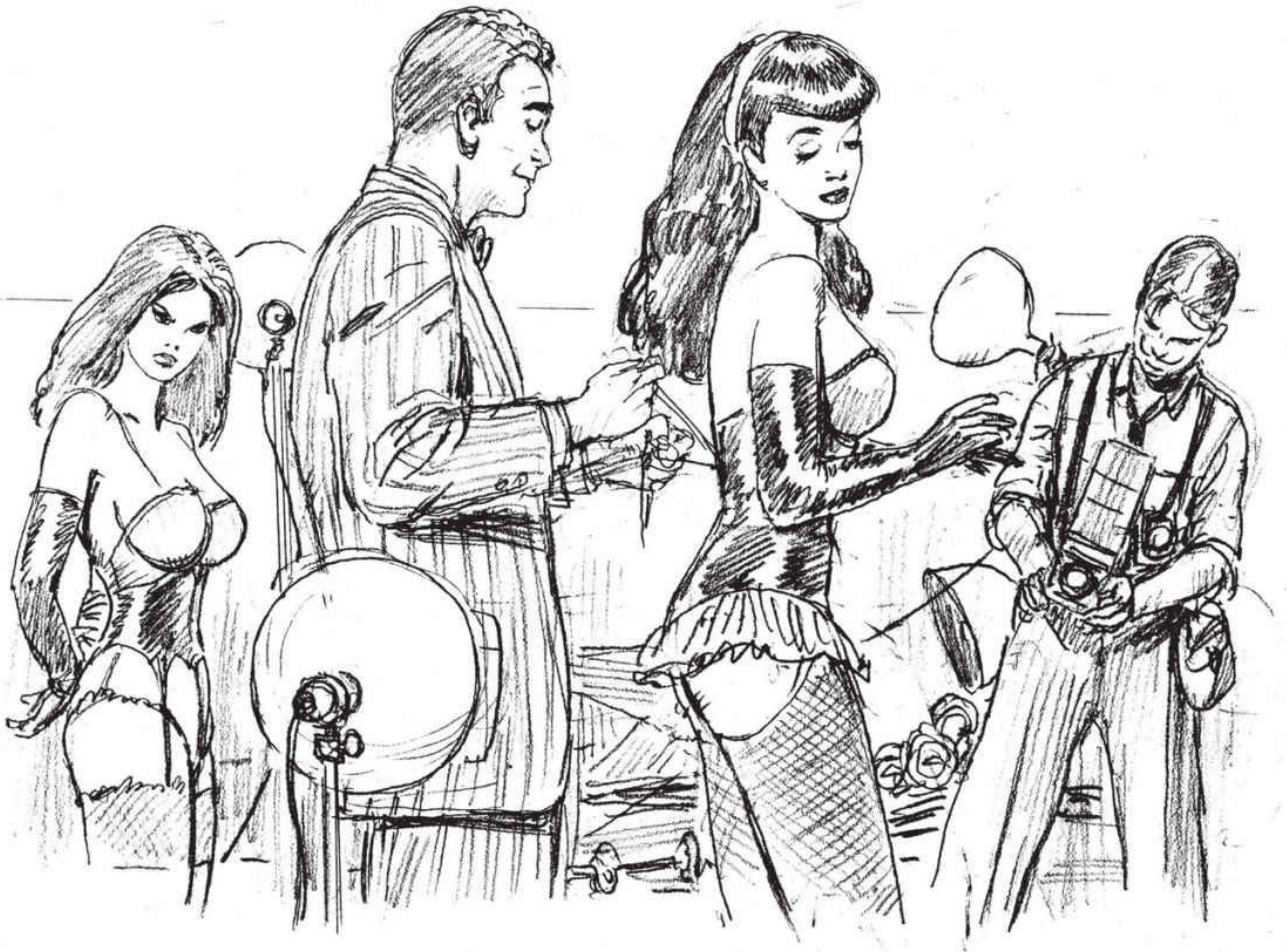
"Frank," I answered. She shook my hand.

"Drieser and Sherwood Anderson lived here too." All this from the tomato with the rubber ball in her mouth.

Bonnie was struggling to pull on a high, laced leather boot as we walked into 830.

"Peaches!" Irving spouted, as he scurried over to Betty and gave her a squeeze.





Klaw pointed to Charlie. "This is Jonathan Winters; Vinny you know."

"If you're a comedian, tell us a joke," Betty chirped as she threw her coat down on a chair and started to unbutton her blouse.

Charlie adjusted his tie and took a pen out of his pocket to use as a mike. "Who is the most popular man at the nudist colony?" Silence. "The man who can carry two cups of coffee and twelve donuts at the same time."

Everybody laughed. Bonnie just stared at Betty. Betty took off her bra. Bonnie stared. Off came the skirt and panties. Bonnie was still staring.

"So she shouldn't look like Houdini, bring the ends back under the armpits and around between her thighs. Like this." Irving was directing Charlie as he struggled to bind Betty.

Bonnie wasn't saying anything, but with a ball in her mouth she couldn't say anything even if she wanted to. I had finished a couple of head shots of the leather-clad duo.

"Stunning!" Klaw was looking at my drawings.

"Very nice. From now on you do all of the heads for Gene. He doesn't do faces that good."

The Bondage King, in a stroke of his sovereign power, ordained the decapitation of all of ENEG's females.

Vinny had finished shooting and was packing up his equipment. Bonnie had left, and Betty was saying her good-byes to Irving.

"Damn," Charlie whispered to me in the hallway. "I thought there was going to be a cat fight."

"I was thinking the same thing," I said as I pushed the elevator button. "The only thing missing would have been Mae Weston."

Betty caught up to us. "Going down?" she purred.

We could hear the commotion even before we landed on the ground floor. The elevator door struggled to open against the mob in the lobby. Flash bulbs were blazing. People were screaming.

"Is it President Truman?" Betty shouted to a breathless fan.

"Better yet," he shouted back. "Gorgeous George!"

We managed to press forward in the throng. There was the flamboyant wrestler topped with a magnificent head of curly platinum blonde hair, dressed as Henry the Eighth, complete with a long flowing scarlet robe. In his arms was Bonnie. She was smiling as she pulled back her hair with one of George's gold-plated bobby pins.

We made it to the street. Betty hailed a cab and we headed for the Erie Line back to Jersey. We never saw Bonnie again after that night of The Transfiguration. In the embrace of Gorgeous George, they must have ascended to kitsch heaven, and were right up there with Mr. Peanut, Uncle Sam, and Norman Vincent Peale.

Taking Louie's advice, I passed on Irving's offer. My brief career in bondage ended, but I still have one of Vinny's photos of Betty from the shoot in Room 830 of the old Chelsea.





Angela

Thus, Red Sonja entered history. Sonja! The most magnificent vessel of wrath 'ere to stalk the ancient kingdoms...

To know Stan Lee, the *praesens supremus* of Marvel Comics, was to know a bald Stan Lee. To know the great innovator of the Marvel line was also to know a truly nice bald guy, an opinion held by almost everyone in the craft. Stan wanted a meeting to discuss my involvement with Red Sonja. I'd been drawing the adventures of the crimson-haired barbarian for almost a year and the sales were very encouraging.

There was a crowd at the end of the hall leading to the Lee sanctum sanctorum. The hall was a virtual Marvel Pantheon, leaping, crouching and snarling from the walls were The Hulk, Spiderman, and the rest of the Marvel lineup. A TV crew was arrayed in and outside Stan's office. I met Roy Thomas at the edge of the crowd.

"Stan Lee presents — his toupee!" he whispered.

Stan, sporting a full head of hair, was dressed as a cowboy, complete with boots and chaps.

Next to Stan was Captain Sticky, hero to millions of comic book fans. He resembled a fractious blend of the Captain of the Pinafore and the Mad Hatter. They were reciting the virtues of Rival dog food from cue cards. It was the final take.

"Marvel Rangers, you can believe bronco bustin' Uncle Stan and..." Sticky concluded, "...cowpoke Captain Sticky, that Rival is the best gol-dangdest dog food ever to come a-wranglin' across the north forty!"

After the shoot, with spurs jingling, Stan strode into the conference room.

"What do you know about Angela Trouvaille?" he asked, as he sat down and propped his boots up on the long table.

"Is that Captain Sticky's girlfriend?" I inquired.

"Sticky should be so lucky. She's gorgeous. She's been going to comic book conventions dressed as Red Sonja."

"Ingenious. Great idea!" I enthused. "Any publicity about our favorite redhead is OK with me."

"Not so great," Stan intoned with gravity. "Sticky says she's a stripper at the Melody Burlesque on 48th."

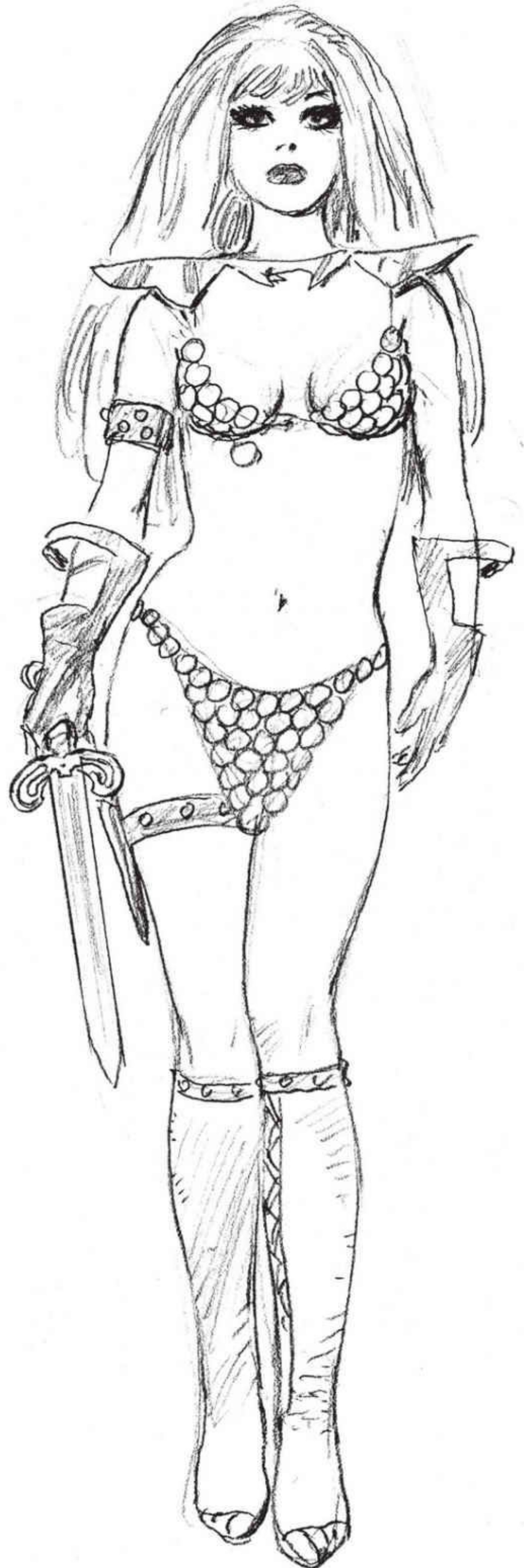
Stan arranged several photos of Angela on the table in front of me. "If Sonja's going places, we can't have a stripper parading around in her costume."

Angela's eyes were spectacular charred openings. To see Angela was to remember those mascara-ringed eyes. They looked like a pair of tarantulas crawling across a paper plate.

"She makes a terrific Sonja!" I exclaimed. "Are you sure it's the same person who's dancing at the Melody?"

"Not dancing," Stan was up and pacing.

"Stripping! A professional nude performer is not what we need to represent Red Sonja."



Stan gathered the shots of Angela and stuffed them back in his briefcase.

"There's a bunch of photos circulating that show Linda Carter in bed with some klutz."

"That's Superman's problem," I suggested.

"It taints the image," he continued. "It could hurt Wonder Woman the same way this stripper could hurt us. Now I've got to get out of this dumb suit and take a pee."

The world's only Jewish cowboy with a toupee gave me a quick handshake and left for the men's room, which had a large poster of Howard the Duck hanging over the urinal.

I resolved to check out the Melody Burlesque. As I was passing Roy Thomas' office I poked my head in and invited him to join me in the investigation. Roy, one of Marvel's most prolific writers, was the editor of the Sonja books and had written some of the stories. We took the IRT and got off at 50th and Broadway and hoofed it over to 48th and 9th.

The Melody had the overripe charm of an old shoe.

"Looks like King Kong was noshing the on third floor," Roy observed.

"There'll be no mistaking her if she's dancing this afternoon," I told Roy as we approached the box office. A half dozen glossies were pinned to either side of the narrow doorless entrance. None of the shots were of Angela.



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Long and narrow, the theater had about a hundred seats. The audience was exclusively male. Scattered about in the gloom was a platoon of shadowy forms. We sat down in the front row and awaited the next set. The stage was large enough to accommodate a three-piece band. One musician, a mangy maestro of the banjo, gargled a song about spurned love, a woman named Naomi and a dog named Pal.

As the maestro did battle with a painful coda, two elderly oriental women sat down next to Roy. He froze. Only his eyeballs moved.

"We gotta change seats," he whispered out of the corner of his mouth.

Too late. The curtains parted and the band began a raucous version of *Love to Love You, Baby*.

"Presenting the Jewel of the Orient, that fabulous fortune cookie from Flatbush — *Minka!*"

The disembodied voice came from a small speaker covered with tire tape that dangled from the proscenium. Into the spotlight stepped a tall Chinese woman with mammoth breasts wearing a riot of pink plumage. The oriental matrons began to applaud loudly. The one next to Roy started chattering to him in Chinese pointing to Minka, herself and her companion.

Perhaps the Fortune Cookie was a near relative of the dowager duo. Was it a proud mother and aunt come to support their aspiring Szechuan Ann Miller? After Minka came three more dancers, none of them Angela. The ladies continued a running commentary loudly berating each performer in sulfurous Mandarin.



Sure enough, the towers and castles went like lightening out of sight, nothing but Jersey on a drizzly night...

The rise of "The She -Devil with a Sword" became meteoric. Fan clubs sprouted from coast to coast. Bob Pinaha, the president of the New Jersey association, had me on the phone.

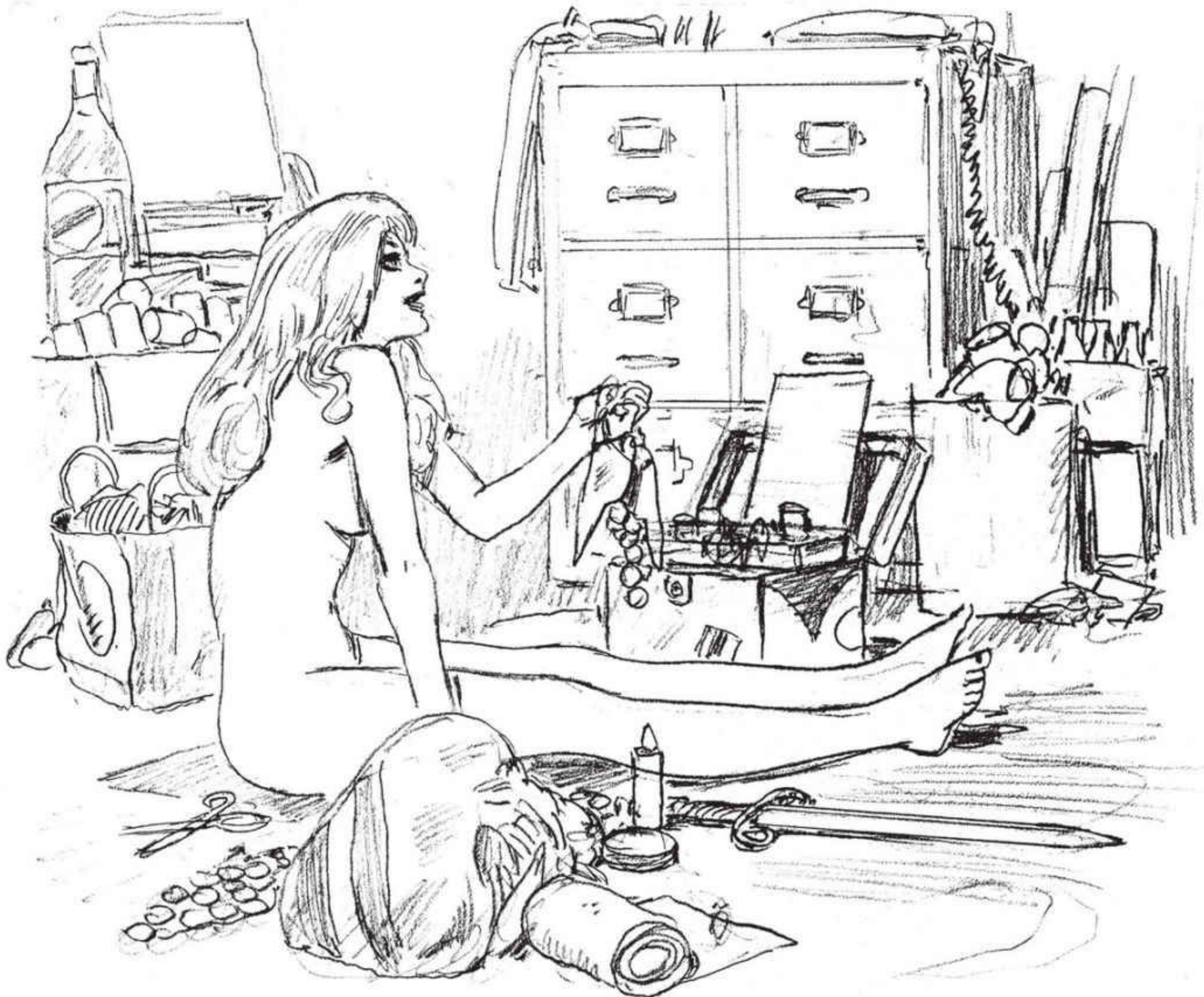
"We're bringing Angela Trouvaille to Lilly Langtry's on Route 9 in Sayreville for our biggest meeting yet. She made the Red Sonja costume out of the fender of a '69 Dodge!"

"That's a great trivia question," I enthused. "I'd love to see it!" Bobby Pin invited me to meet the mysterious Angela.

Route 9 in Sayreville was a tepid strip of X-rated movie houses and smoke-glutted go-go bars. I grabbed the last parking place and pulled open the door to the cosmic gin mill of the ages. "Sonja! Sonja! Sonja!" Lilly's was jammed with chanting fans awaiting the appearance of the flame-haired warrior woman.

Bobby Pin found me in the crowd. "She's upstairs in the manager's office getting into her costume. She said to send you up as soon as you got here. Top door on the right."

I climbed the stairs through layers of boozy cigarette smoke.





The office was the cluttered nerve center of the club. In the middle of the agglomeration sat Angela, wearing the most spectacular red wig I'd ever seen. She was working on her costume, not in it.

"Hi honey!" she chirped. "Hold this."

Angie handed me one of the shoulder pieces of the costume. It resembled a perforated andiron.

"Made from the fender of a '69 Dodge," I proudly noted.

"See if you can find the selastic. Look in that bag, hon." She was surrounded by shopping bags filled with wardrobe material.

"It's in here," was the muffled response.

Out of the bathroom waddled Howard The Duck, a perfect realization easily five feet tall. I was standing in a saloon, on Route 9, in Sayreville New Jersey, looking at a naked woman and a huge duck.

"Walter, this is the Sonja artist."

I shook the duck's wing.

"Now hold this leather thong while I get into the halter."

I obliged.

"Seeing that you work for Marvel Comics, maybe you should introduce me down there," Angie said as she slithered into a metal bikini bottom.

"Work for Marvel?" I allowed. "Hell no. I'm just a lucky freelancer, but I'll do the honors."

"Make it real spooky, I mean like outrageous!" she urged.

"Comic book fans love outrageous." The feathery observation came from the duck.

Angie hefted her sword and slowly circled me. "Honey, come up and see me some time."

It was an outrageous impression of Mae West.

Bobby Pin met me at the bottom of the stairs and guided me through the raucous throng toward the stage in the main room. A reasonable facsimile of Captain Marvel leaned on the bar sipping a martini. Next to him was Thor, conversing with a towering Hulk. They seemed to disdain the mob of hooting Sonja fans.

Deployed on the stage was a six piece band wearing ratty Conan The Barbarian costumes. Behind them loomed a crude backdrop of a Hyborian landscape. An



androgynous female in a fur bikini stood in front of a silver gong holding a sizable wooden mallet. Bobby stepped up and tried to quiet the crowd enough to introduce me.

"Fans, it's my Marvelous pleasure to introduce Red Sonja's artist!" His attempt was lost in the thunderous response to the mere mention of her name. Bobby looked like a sandlot Goebbels working the Nuremberg Rallies.

I spotted Angie's red wig at the back of the hall. Then the gong was struck and the thunderous reverberation stilled the crowd.

"Come, Red Sonja," I intoned into the mike.
"Come from the age Hyborian."

Like Moses commanding the Red Sea to part, the fans formed a path to the platform.

"Come from the primordial mists!" I continued.

Angie, holding her sword high above her head, started to snake-hip her way toward me.

"Come, O mistress of dark rage!" Angie mounted the stage next to me. "Sonja, Sonja, Sonja..." I trailed off with a deep bow.

"This better be good, honey," she began. "Did I ever tell you about King Ghannif? He was so crooked he could have used a corkscrew for a ruler!" She paused, wiggled her tush, and stared down at the fans. Stunned silence. "The old goat cornered me once and said, 'I'm mad about your flaming hair, your enticing eyes, your ruby lips, your pearly teeth, your lush figure'..." she paused. "I asked him if he was makin' a pass or just takin' inventory." She was doing her Mae West imitation. It was dreadful. But no matter, the fans ultimately recovered and were ecstatic.

After her schtick, Angie stepped down into the crowd to sign autographs. The band began a barbaric rendition of the "Song of Red Sonja," sung by the trumpet player holding a grinning plastic skull and a wooden broadsword.

Reporters from the *Newark Star Ledger*, *The Home News*, and *The Asbury Park Press* were peppering the redhead with questions. A senior producer for Channel 3 in Philadelphia was furiously taking notes.



I made my way over to the bar and ordered a gin and tonic.

"She looks great, but the act's gotta go," said a very drunk Cameron Mitchell sitting on the stool next to me.

"Yeah," I responded. "She hasn't a clue about Red Sonja."

Mitchell took another sip of his martini. "It's a very hot concept. I came all the way from Manhattan to have a look."

"Hey," I enthused, "you were great in *Treasure of Makuba*. What do you think? Will Red Sonja ever make it to film?"

"If the Conan movie does well, they'll do Sonja, but Angela won't be cast in the lead."

Mitchell was right. The Conan movies were made, followed by Red Sonja, with Brigitte Nielson as the redhead, opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger as her yahoo sidekick.



Linda

The next morning there was a message on my answering machine from Sticky. "Meet me at Vampira's Comic Crypt in Jersey. Livingston Mall. I'm there from six until closing, and wear the Red Sonja T-shirt."

Walt Freeberg, aka Captain Sticky, had done personal appearances at almost every comic book shop on the eastern seaboard and points west. With much hoopla the Stickymobile would arrive, and Walt would emerge, in full regalia, to sign books and hawk the Marvel tsatskes to the innocent.

Sure enough, the Stickymoblie was parked in front of the main entrance to the mall. It resembled a huge striped tortellini noodle wearing a derby. Half of the kids waiting in line at Vampira's were wearing Red Sonja T-shirts. I hung around until break time and met Sticky in the stockroom. He was sitting in front of a wall dripping with rubber Frankenstein and Mortimer Snerd masks.

"A Roman Circus! No, that Sonja thing last night was even better!" Walter proclaimed.

"You were there?" I asked.

"That was me in the duck suit. Stan wants to get inside info on Angela Trouville and the whole phenomenon."

I took one of the Snerd masks and tried it on. "Stan was concerned that she'd been dancing nude at the Melody burlesque on 48th, Roy and I checked it out and she wasn't in the lineup."

"So did I," Walter admitted. "But the Marvel management is still nervous about Angela."

Sticky put on a Frankenstein mask and admired himself in a large wall mirror.

"The Sonja fan clubs from Boston, New York, Jersey, and Maryland are planning a huge Red Sonja Convention at the Sheraton in Philadelphia. Three days. Over the fourth of July weekend. They're recruiting girls to be in a look-alike contest. Already they have four signed up."

Vampira opened the door. "Captain, you've got a lot of fans out here waiting."

Walt hung up the mask. "Gotta go. Try to get as much dope on Angela as you can, and cooperate with the con organizers. You've got to be there. Stan insists."

Sticky headed back into the shop. "Sticky Kids!" He trumpeted, "Don't be icky, stick with Sticky!"



Edging my way past the Sticky fans, I was approached by a gangly teenager who was slipping a comic book out of a plastic bag. "Would you sign my copy of Iron Man?"

"I don't draw Iron Man, I draw Red Sonja."

"Wow!" He exclaimed, "Then you gotta come with me."

I followed. Around the corner was The Beveled Edge, an upscale frame and print shop.

The kid ran through the door. "Linda! Guess who this is?" He was pointing at me as I approached. Behind the counter, a step up from the floor, was a striking powerhouse blonde in a hot fuchsia top and turquoise bell bottoms. "You weren't kidding?" the kid spouted. "You are the guy who draws Red Sonja?"

I affirmed with a nod.

Linda walked to the edge of the counter. I was eye level with the treasure chest of Quetzalcoatl. Venusian mounds of such amplitude as to confound ten thousands of infidels.

"Sir, this is Linda Behrle, she's going to be one of the contestants in the Red Sonja look-alike contest in Philadelphia."

I was struck dumb. My power of speech had been bombed back into the stone age.



Having confessed to nodding off during Reverend Potter's 'Eden's Apple' sermon, I will admit further that the thrust of his harangue was not entirely lost on either Fudder or me. I instantly recognized 'The Temptress,' with a pair of MacIntoshes reminiscent of Aunt Madge. In fact, the faint odor of Noxema wafted by as they bobbed a scant two feet from my nose.

"You must know about the Sonja Convention on the Fourth of July weekend in Philadelphia," she said as she stepped down next to me and took my hands in hers.

"These hands draw — *RED SONJA!*" she shrieked as she threw my hands aside and began strutting around among the racks of frames parrying an unseen enemy with a yardstick. "Red Sonja from Herkoona, that's all anybody knows about her. She marches in parades and fights like a soldier, God knows if anybody can tell how..."

Linda was massacring a passage from *Shadow of the Vulture* by Robert E. Howard, the creator of Conan and Red Sonja.

"Fred Thorne, I'm closing shop! We're going for a cup of coffee and a burger. On me!"

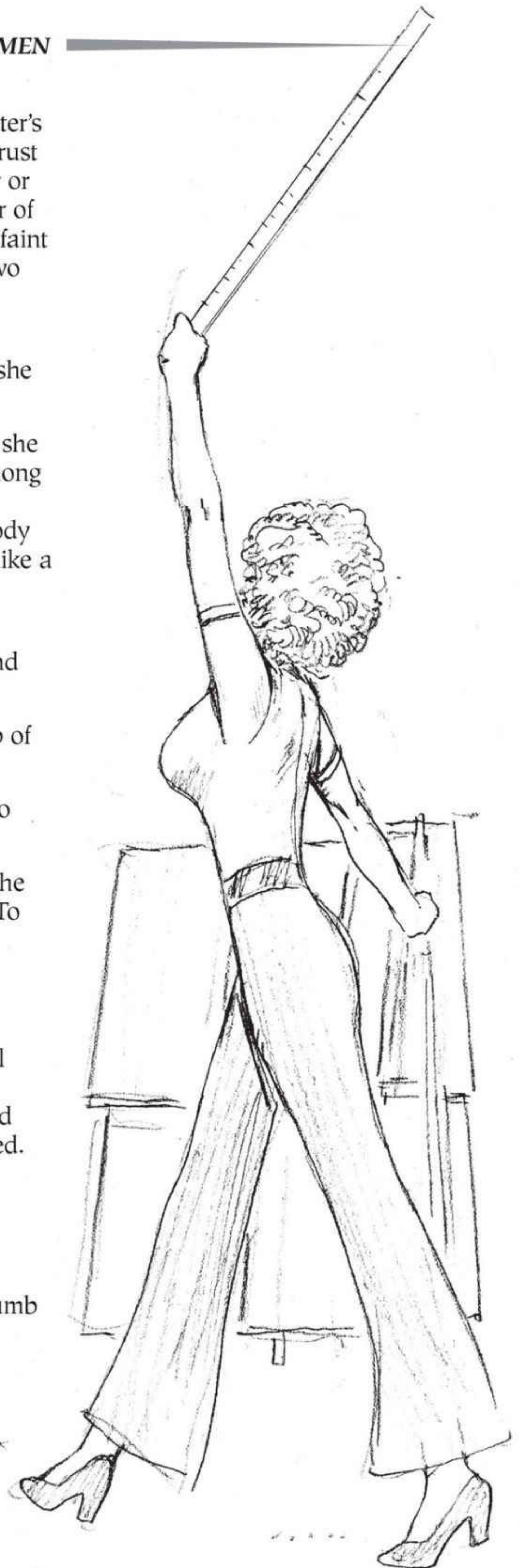
Linda strode into the food court, with me struggling to keep up with her.

"It plays, Fred! This is right out of Preston Sturges!" she proclaimed, as she raised her coffee mug in a toast. "To Red Sonja, and to Fred Thorne, her artist!" Our mugs clacked together.

She became teary-eyed but kept rattling on.

"Carla, my kid sister, made my costume, she's the real talent in the family. A genius. The next Edith Head!" Linda was all of nineteen, making the kid sister a child prodigy. "Ritchie, my brother! An artist!" she continued. "Nine years old and he draws better than Oscar Hammerstein!"

I offered her a tissue. "Sorry Fred, it's like with these boobs, I mean everybody thinks I should be on Broadway, but I'm out in Dismal Swamp playing a dumb blonde in a beat-up old church."





Linda's breasts were her focus, and her eyes always seemed to say, 'do you want to see them?' They would become the ensign to Sonja's hapless fans.

"You've got to see my sword!" Linda was on her feet heading for the mall exit. "It's Spanish. A double-edged jobby. I got it at Gene's World of Knives on Springfield Avenue in Newark."

We were galloping across the parking lot. "That's my car. The red one."

The interior of the battered '70 Dodge was jammed with theater paraphernalia. It was the prop room of Twentieth Century Fox on wheels. "It's in here somewhere." She was rummaging through the clutter. "Must be in the trunk." Linda popped it and attempted to find it in the compressed mound of costume material. "Shit! My sister must have it." With a dramatic sweep she slammed the trunk shut.

"*The Last of the Red Hot Lovers* is up at the Stoney Hill Playhouse in Warren," she announced. "I'm doing the Sally Kellerman role. Give me your wallet." I hesitated. "I'm not going to mug you Fred, give it here."

I gave her the wallet. She held it at arm's length and dropped it on the tarmac.

"Do you remember the scene when Sally bends over to pick up Alan Arkin's wallet?"

I nodded as she slowly jackknifed over until her hand touched the wallet. She paused, turned to look at me, winked and gave her buns a salacious wiggle.

"That always gets a big laugh!"

Behold a derriere milled in heaven's forge! Farewell Tempest. Auf Wiedersehen Maria and Sheena. Pax vobiscum Bonnie, Lissa, Lenore, Angela...exeunt omnes.

Linda stood, and with a toss of her golden mane, opened the car door and bounced into the driver's seat.

"The movie stunk, but the play is vintage Neil Simon."

She pumped my hand, slammed the door and started the engine. "It was great meeting you, Fred. If I don't see you at the show I'll see you in Phillie!"

Red Sonja

As the convention loomed, I did a life-size painting of the redhead. It was a typical Sonja pose. With bloody sword in hand she stood astride a vanquished spider the size of a 12-cylinder truck engine. With the framed Sonja painting loaded in Bobby's van, we pulled up at the Sheraton the day before the opening of the con. Within seconds, there were several uniformed flunkies humping my grisly magnum opus into the lobby.

"Right here, front and center." The day manager was directing the proceedings. "Magnificent! 'Vive la rouge!' All Philadelphia will be at her feet!"

Four floors of the hotel had been booked for fans, dealers, publishers, and assorted interested Sonja followers. My room was 406. Soon after settling in, a heavy object struck the door three times. It resounded through the place like it was the Castle Frankenstein.

I opened the door. A sinewy young woman stood in the hallway. She was wearing a great Red Sonja costume and a bad wig. She held the point of her sword against my chest. It was a pig-sticker the size of a bassoon. I slowly backed into the room with the blade nuzzling my sternum. Following her was a tall bearded man in a full length black hooded cloak, carrying a sack made of sewn animal skins.

She backed me into a chair.

"Neat costume," I managed. "Is it made from the fender of a Buick?"

"Silence!" roared the cloaked figure as he threw the sack down on the couch.



The Sonja slammed the point of her sword down on the thick carpeted floor between my feet.

"Wizard! Look your fill if you wish," she growled as she leaned toward me. Her modest bosom was pulled together and boosted with cotton to give the effect of bounty. "But judge me you can never do," she continued, "for my values are sheathed in steel!" She whipped the sword up from the floor with the agility of a baton twirler and slapped it across her chest. "Even my heart! Aye, by Mithra, my heart most of all!"

Whoever she was, this lady with the boyish figure and aquiline nose had transformed herself into the persona of the Hyrkanian warrior woman. It was sorcery, and the redhead had come to summon her wizard, which I soon gathered was me.

She gestured toward the cloaked figure. "Mikal! The garb."

Mikal produced from the sack a first class wizard's suit, complete with stars and moons and a pointed hat.

"You are Thenef, my Wizard!" she announced as she threw the costume onto my lap. "You will be able to call upon the free services of my elves, but you must be prudent. And no backsliding or evasion from you, we must do battle against mighty evil."

She solemnly turned and strode out the door. Mikal followed, but not before he dropped a manuscript in my lap. I flipped through it. It was a detailed script for a sword and sorcery spectacular that was to be performed in the main ballroom of the Sheraton on Saturday night.



"I see you've met Wendy and Richard Star," Bobby Pin said as he poked his head in the door.

"I guess so. Tell me about them."

He came in and took a chair by the window.

"They're Mr. And Mrs. They met through the *Savage Sword of Conan* letters page. He's a science teacher and she's a fan artist. Wendy draws lady barbarians. Richard speaks five languages including Swahili, and has a full figure of Sonja tattooed on his back."

I showed him the script.

"Am I supposed to learn this part by tomorrow night?"

"You can practically ad-lib your part. It's spectacular!" Bobby enthused. "Sonja Sturm und Drang! Wendy wrote it for the look-alike show. We've got a nine piece orchestra, the same guys from Lilies with a Captain America, a Human Torch and a guy on guitar wearing a Walt Disney mask."

Bobby examined the Wizard's suit. "This is terrific! Wendy told me she was making it for you. She's also a member of the Costume Clan. Most of the Sonjas are into costumes and exhibitionism." He turned to leave. "Give the script a quick look and come down to the lobby. Channel 3 and 6 are here, along with reporters from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Planet*, and *The Drummer*."

When I stepped off the elevator the lobby was jammed. Fans and media were everywhere. Marshaled in front of the Sonja painting were nine Sonjas executing mighty sword swings, grimacing, and giving interviews. I spotted Roy Thomas.

"Phillie has an inferiority complex," he noted. "In Manhattan this would draw one reporter from the *Police Gazette*. But here, anything from The Big Apple is front page news. They're booked on the Merv Griffen Show tomorrow. Tonight they're having dinner with the mayor."

I was on tiptoe trying to see the action.

"Angie, Linda, and Wendy I've met. Who are the others?"

"There's another Wendy, a Diane, a Gita, Michelle and Chris. The Sonja on the end is Ralph, a transvestite. They call him Fred Sonja."



Early next morning I drifted into the Grand Ballroom. The stage was set for the show. Great brooding mountains loomed over a castle overgrown with sinuous vines. I made my way on stage between papier-mâché boulders and bogus shrubbery.

"All it needs are a few strumpets," a voice spoke from the shadows behind a gnarled masonite tree.

"Wait already, those we got," I answered.

A slightly paunchy Spiderman with a briefcase stepped into the half-light.

"It looks like Spidey, but it sounds like Stan Lee," I remarked.

"It's me," whispered the ersatz web slinger. "I got in last night. The buzz on this con reached the big guys. I came down to see for myself."

"Better keep the suit on," I advised. "If the fans got wind that you're here you'd be mobbed worse than the Sonjas."

We took a window seat in the coffee shop.

"Did you see the news last night? The Sonjas were on every Channel at six and eleven." Stan pulled a stack of newspapers out of his briefcase. "Front page of The Inquirer and these other weeklies, and then there's the TV coverage. Sonja's heating up. We've got to get more control over this thing with the look-alikes. Roy tells me one is a guy, and for five bucks he'll take his top off and pose for group photos!"

There was a sudden flurry of alarm from the waitresses. They were pointing out the window next to our table. A disheveled man in an overcoat approached the glass and whipped open his coat. The famous Philadelphia Flasher had painted his penis red in honor of Sonja's visit to the City of Brotherly Love.





By show time the auditorium was jammed to capacity. The nine Sonjas entered from the back of the house and streamed down both aisles hurling Hyborian invectives at the delighted fan-swarm. As they approached the orchestra pit the curtains parted and the frenetic She-Devils mounted the stage and raised their swords and began to chant Sonja's name. The audience joined in and it became a throbbing mantra to a poor man's pagan goddess. The wizard appeared in a plume of smoke and parlayed with each Sonja. From the stage I counted at least six Spideys in the audience. The lumpy one had his head in his hands.

The band, directed by an enthusiast in a frog suit, was committing auditory rape of Bach's Taccota and Fugue in D minor, which introduced a barbarienne ballet. It was the chorus line of the Grand Guignol in iron bikinis. Wendy Star, the première danseuse, did the grand finale with her broadsword balanced on her heaving bosom.

We decided to celebrate the wrap at a restaurant around the corner from the hotel. The eatery sat between the two remaining burlesque houses on the tenderloin. Halfway through the meal two strippers on a break from next door spotted Angie and Chris. It was like the reunion of veterans of some long-forgotten war. After dinner the Sonjas with their Wizard and the slightly paunchy Spiderman filed into the theater and filled up the front row for the 10 o'clock performance, compliments of the management.

After Phillie, we did the show in New York, Boston, and Indianapolis. The media celebration roared on. Marvel Management had become increasingly involved in the production. Angie and Fred were eliminated. By the time we did the show in San Diego, there were only three Sonjas and the wizard left in the cast. It was atop the El Cortez Hotel that Ghita of Alizarr was born.

Linda Behrle and I had finished a costumed bit for a PBS documentary on the roof garden. The paparazzi had been chasing us all day. She seemed exhausted. As the crew was packing up, Linda flipped off her red wig and liberated her natural blonde hair. As it caught the light of the setting sun she turned to me.

"I can't do this any more," as tears were tearing at the corners of her eyes. "You've got to find another..."

It was Sonja saying goodbye. Linda, as the blonde warrior woman, would become the inspiration for Ghita, a warrior-goddess of my own device.



Ghita

Alizarr, at the crossroads of the trade routes from Nephthys and the fertile valleys of Baalzarra. Alizarr, host to men of ambition and treachery, and women of strange skills and desires...

Jay Hyde was a pigeon-chested little man who was the son of Johnny Hyde, the lucky Hollywood agent who discovered Marilyn Monroe. Jay hadn't discovered anybody yet, but he was undeterred.

"I love this concept!" Jay effused as Linda Behrle strode into the room dressed in the Ghita of Alizarr costume. "That sweet old lady out there, she must be Polly."

Linda had seen Jay's mother, the woman who Johnny jettisoned for Marilyn Monroe. Polly moved to the East Coast and had been living on West 83rd ever since.

"Your screen treatment is close, but no cigar." Harvey Flaxman was studying my feckless attempt to transform my graphic novel *Ghita of Alizarr* into a vehicle for the screen. Flaxman and Hyde had optioned Ghita. Their claim to fame was the movie *Grizzly*, a rousing rip-off of *Jaws*, featuring an 18-foot, 2000-pound whopper who munched on unwary campers in a national park.

"Darling, turn around. Let me see that getup." Jay's eyeballs were bouncing off his cheekbones as Linda following his direction, managing a majestic pirouette while clutching her Gene's World of Knives broadsword. "*Una vera bontà!*" Jay enthused. "The ass is to die for, how old are you darling?"

"Twenty-four," Linda purred as she leaned over and with a wink, chucked Jay under his chin. "Two of those years I spent on my back in the Iron Devil Brothel."





"How come Harvey's blushing..." Linda chirped as she loomed over Hyde, "...when it's you that's looking at my boobs?"

"I saw you in *Playboy*," he managed.

"That was a really lousy shot of me," she returned. "I'm the model for Frank's Moonshine McJugs comic, so I'm in practically every issue. I did her on the *Playboy* Channel show. Frank did Uncle Zit. Did you see it?"

"Of course!" answered the ever-affable Hyde.

"We've got enough seed money to move right ahead. Harvey's making the arrangements to shoot in Northern Italy."

Jay was standing next to Linda, who bore an uncanny resemblance to home-wrecking Monroe. One of Linda's regular gigs was with Beauty and the Beast, an agency that hustled a full range of entertainers from singing gorillas to belly dancers. Linda was their Marilyn.

Polly's suite was a labyrinthine museum cluttered with drab overstuffed furniture that would have given Eve Hotchkiss an embolism. The mammoth English breakfront in the corner looked small in comparison to the black man with dreadlocks that lurched into the living room. Holding his hand was an adolescent girl who was an uncanny replication of Lenore Lans.

"Pussycat!" Hyde strode over to the girl. "Come meet the man who created Ghita!"

Jay brought her over to the couch. "Frank, meet Ghita's sister!"

The perfumed nymphet, wearing cutoffs and a tank top, bounded over and hopped onto my lap.

"I love cartooners!" she squealed, and kissed me on the cheek.

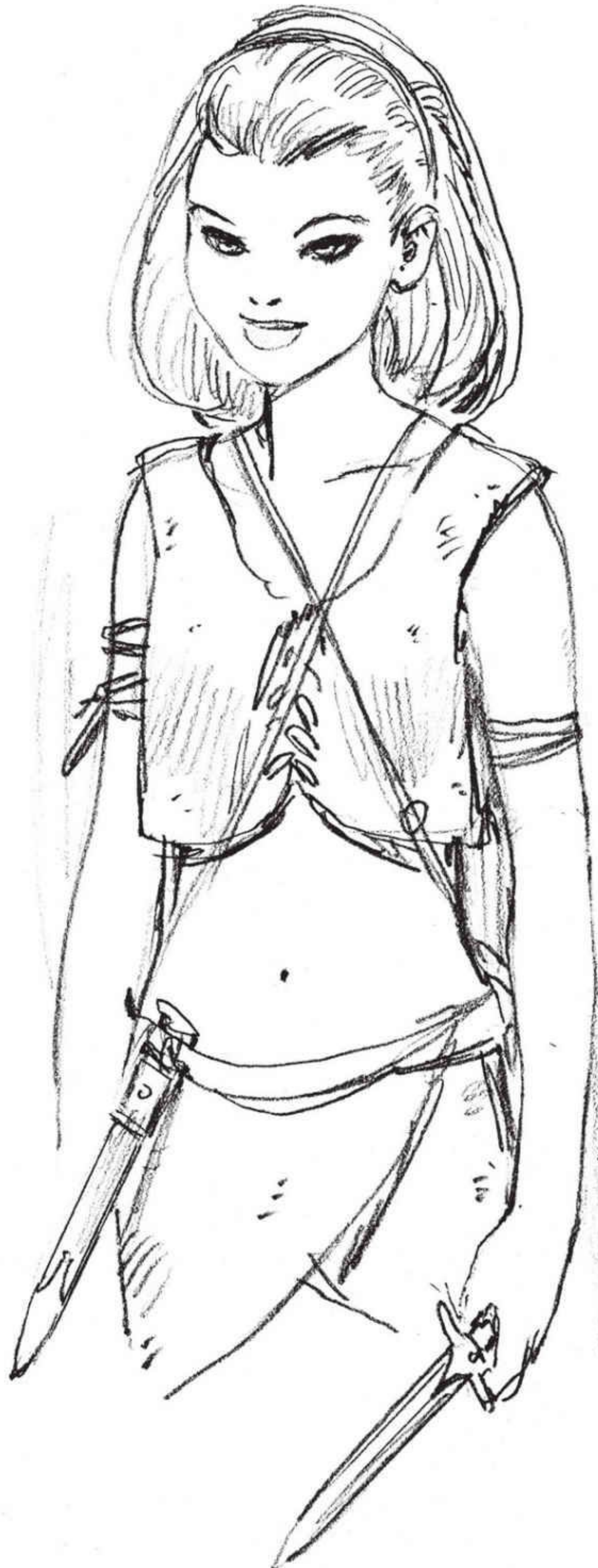
Luscious Lenore must have ordered *The Secret Of The Golden Flower* from the Johnson Smith catalogue. Fred Johnson, who sat on the other side of Lenore in Mrs. Nordmeyer's class, had a copy of it and was convinced it held the secret to eternal youth, wealth, and happiness. The only problem was that the last time I saw Fred he was forty-years-old and the happy owner of a junkyard in Cincinnati.

The last time I saw Lenore she was sitting by the Rahway River bridge across from Koos Brothers. Fudder and I waited almost an hour until she left so that we could go skinny-dipping below the dam. That was in July. She moved away before Franklin School reopened.

Could this be revenge for my part in Stebner's plot? Had she stayed young through dark sorcery, only to re-enter my life and bring ruin to the Ghita film project?

Nowhere in the hundreds of pages of the Ghita stories had I mentioned a sister. The blonde was bereft of any siblings. True, there were the sisters of the Iron Devil Brothel, of which Ghita was the *piece de resistance*. So much so that she chanced to please the king and went on to become the queen of Alizarr.

"Sandy will be perfect as Ghita's sis!" Jay proclaimed as he took her hand and led her to the middle of the room. "She can sing, too!"



Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul.

The nymphet began a brassy a cappella rendition of Madonna's Material girl. The only thing missing were the conical bustiers. But she did grab her crotch and simulate sex with the living room portiere as a finale. The tall black dude shot her an approving smile.

"Bravo!" trumpeted Hyde. "Now meet Kahlil."

The dude and I shook hands.

"Kahlil will be doing the music for the film," Hyde announced. "He was in London for seven years working with Pete Townshend. The Who wouldn't be The Who without Kahlil."

The dude seemed uncomfortable with Jay's intro. Reason enough not to further discuss his musical credentials.

"We need more coffee!" said Harvey, going over my sketches on the cluttered dining room table. "These costume designs are fantastic. Wonderful. The set drawings for the Azzian caves. Fabulous."

I knew there was a zinger. Harvey had the talent of an anesthesiologist.

"We'll need to do some tweaking. Slight adjustments. A few changes here and there," Harvey continued. "As for the treatment, I'll take it from here. I've got some great ideas. You're gonna love my ideas."

"Harvey's a genius below the line. We can't miss." Jay was cuddling with Sandy on the couch. "In this business you need connections and a talent for schmooze."

Hyde continued, "That's my *métier*. Tomorrow we do a meeting at Playboy to pitch the tie-in. We've got the Macdougall Street Playhouse next week for the casting call."





Linda was charging down 83rd. "Paging Roger Corman!" she trilled. "Frank! There won't be anything left of your blonde after those shlockmeisters finish with her."

We were heading for the subway. I was hefting the suitcases with the Ghita costume, while she toted her makeup case and her sword in a black leather sheath.

"The classic bottom-feeding east coast feather merchants. And the kid. Christ only knows what's going on there."

"He reps adolescent females," I explained. "He said he handled Brooke Shields for a time. Natalie Wood, too."

Linda threw her head back. "Yeah, right! Are we having fun yet?"

Classic Linda. And the key to why she was still in the boondocks doing local theater. So gorgeous. Such talent. But she had a fear of failure in the Big Time. I knew she'd show up at the cattle call with the dozens of dames that would sleep with an orangutan for a break in a film. Linda wouldn't be compromised, and it was cloaked in her fear of bombing in the happening scene. She would cry easily, and it was rooted in her frustration.

The Macdougall Street Playhouse, for all its cachet, was just a notch above the Melody Burlesque in appearance. Here James Dean had trod the boards. Geraldine Page met Rip Torn upon its stage. By the time I arrived the line of aspirants was already snaking around the corner. A veritable battalion of Ghitas of all sizes and ages. I edged past the queue noting a sprinkling of black hopefuls. One wore a green wig. First in line was a midget with a rope wig that reached all the way to the sidewalk.

"Hej, ja jestem Agnieszka Gregorczyk."

Harvey was onstage with a willowy blonde aspirant wearing a leopard skin tube suit.

"In English, please," Harvey entreated.

"I am Agnes Gregorczyk. For seven years I was with Polish National Theater. Doing many Shakespeare. Did Juliet in Warsaw from time was fourteen."

"Romeo and Juliet in *Polish*!?" Hyde whispered to Murray Kanbar, a principal investor. We were in third row center. Next to me was Arthur Lieberman, the producer of the Red Sonja movie.

"Any film experience?" Harvey inquired.

"Was talking part in *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Also *Flashdance* as sexy bar dancer..."

"Very nice, Agnes," Hyde barked. "What are you going to do for us today?"

"Is from Book One Ghita speaks to rich merchant: 'Tidzio...of course I remember you. We sisters called you *Tidzeeto* the rooster with smallest pecker in Alizarr!'"

"Very nice, darling... NEXT!" Hyde shouted.

Agnes squinted over the footlights. "*NIECH Z YJE POLSKA!*" she proclaimed, then strutted off.

By lunch time we'd seen Kathy Long, the kickboxing champ, Laurene Landon, a contortionist, Sandahl Bergman, two tap dancers, a wan Lana Clarkson, and several actresses from the Soaps and the independent film scene. All bad. The last contestant before the break introduced herself as Ronda Michaels. She was a statuesque soul-destroying bombshell.

"Tell us about yourself, Ronda," inquired Harv, who was rapidly loosing his voice.

"I'm Frank's biggest fan! I have all of his books!" she announced.

Linda, who was sitting a few seats away, glared at her with a vengeance.



I'm sure Frank's glad to hear that, Ronda," Harv croaked. "Now tell us about yourself."

"Actor's Studio '82. I was in *The Howling* 1, and 2, *Beastmaster*, and *Conan*. I started with GLOW when I was in my teens."

"What's GLOW, darling?" queried Hyde.

"Glorious Ladies of Wrestling!" Ronda boasted. "I was the wicked Gloria Vanderbilt who wrestled her maid. I most always lost..."

"What are you doing for us today, Ronda?" interrupted Harvey.

The über-blonde flounced to the edge of the stage and pointed directly at me. "You pukepig!" she growled. "What have you done to me? You order me to the catacombs and have me ravaged by that stinking savage Khan-Dagon!" Ronda then jumped off the stage and proceeded to vault the seats in front of me with the agility of an Olympic athlete.

In an instant she was standing astride the two seats in front of me.

"Hair-balls of Dung!" she bellowed. "The frigging maggot-bag has stolen my body and soul!"

Murray, Jay, and Arthur were awe-struck.

"This body," she snarled, as she pushed her clenched fist close to my face, "is the body of Khan-Dagon, who turned back the ravaging armies of Rahmuz, the multi-armed Archmage of Urd!"

Then Ronda relaxed her fist and blew a kiss at me across her open palm, hopped down and trotted up the aisle to the lobby. Harvey, who was on stage, collected his thoughts.

"N-Next...!" he grunted.





Jasmine

"I've seen Ronda before, but I'll be damned if I can recall where," pondered Murray.

We were taking lunch at Granados on Macdougall Street.

"She nearly scared the shit out of me, but she was great. Fabulous," Hyde enthused as he made notations on a memo pad. "A perfect interpretation. She was Ghita. That will be three call-backs for the morning. Not bad."

"Ronda auditioned for the Sonja role," Arthur announced as he poked through his salad. "But De Laurentiis thought she was too buxom."

"Could that be a problem for us?" I asked.

"Not really, because we're planning a hard R version for cable."

"The Sonja show came in at nine mil," Arthur continued. "It made three in general release. I hated it. Nielson and Bergman were so bad I wanted Dino to dub the whole thing."

"It was a miracle," Harv noted. "Any film that makes it to general release is a miracle."

Munching on my taco I thought of the Cranford Theater. The Red Sonja movie opened prime time on a Friday night. We gathered the whole clan and filled an entire row. The only other person in the theater was a sports fan sitting two rows in front of us watching baseball on a Sony Watchman. He turned it off when the movie started. Fifteen minutes into the show he turned the TV back on.

The line of aspirants was still up the block when we arrived back at the Playhouse. As we entered Ronda approached me in the lobby.

"Frank, would you do a sketch of me... *please*?"

"She did say please," remarked Harvey, with an arched eyebrow, as they continued on to their seats.

It was a really nice June afternoon in the Village. I gathered my sketch pad and we started up Macdougall toward Washington Square Park.

"I'll bet you know my dad," Ronda said as we crossed 3rd. "Gray Stevens. He's a comic book artist. Mostly he works for Marvel."

"I met him once at a Playboy Christmas party," I recalled. "In this craft everybody knows the published stuff, but we seldom ever meet except at a convention or over the phone."

"He loves your artwork," she noted.

"I love his stuff, too, especially on *The Blue Beetle*. Be sure to tell him so."

We were entering the park. A cloud of pigeons rose from the dusky brick walkway as we approached a bench.

"I haven't seen Gray in four years. After my mother died he moved to LA," she said wistfully as we sat down. "Arthur. Arthur Lieberman. Did he talk about me?" she asked.

"He said that you auditioned for the Sonja role."

"Jay Hyde, did he say anything?"

"He mentioned that he thought he'd seen you somewhere before. Not in the films you mentioned, or the wrestling thing."

"Shit."

She was nervously fidgeting with her hair as I began roughing out a drawing. Ronda had done her face to resemble Ghita. It had just the right edge for the part. The essence of the blonde warrior woman was seen in her eyes. They were the Rosetta Stones of sensuality. Her eyes were the keys that promised to unlock the mystery of the eternal enchantress.

She glanced at her watch. "Christ, I'm late for an audition! Gotta go. Sorry, I would have loved to have a sketch."

Ronda dashed off across the park in search of a cab.



I made my way past the contestants in the lobby and found my seat next to Jay. Harv was questioning Linda Behrle.

"What can you tell us about yourself that we don't already know?"

"Forty, twenty-two, thirty-four...silicone-free," she boasted. Jay stood up to stretch.

"Would you sing for us, darling?" he asked.

Linda began a smoky rendition of Stardust. As she sang a tall woman drifted down the aisle and sat down next to Murray and kissed him on the cheek. At first I thought it was Sybil Danning, the hazel-eyed beauty known in Hollywood as the female Clint Eastwood. Seconds later Sandy, the nymphet, came along and sat next to her.

The auditions ground on after Linda's bit. It was after five PM, and the line was still out the door. The last candidate was the midget with the rope wig. She began with a squeaky version of *Over the Rainbow* and segued into a hilarious mini bump-and-grind Lambada.

Hyde applauded wildly. "We're going to need plenty of midgets," he remarked.

"Everyone! Tomorrow. 10 AM."

I met Linda in the dispersing crowd outside the theater.

"I'm parked on Seventh," she announced.

The tunnel traffic was backed up all the way to Chambers Street.

"Forget it. It's over." Linda was at the wheel as we were inching our way up Hudson Street.

"You were great," I remarked.

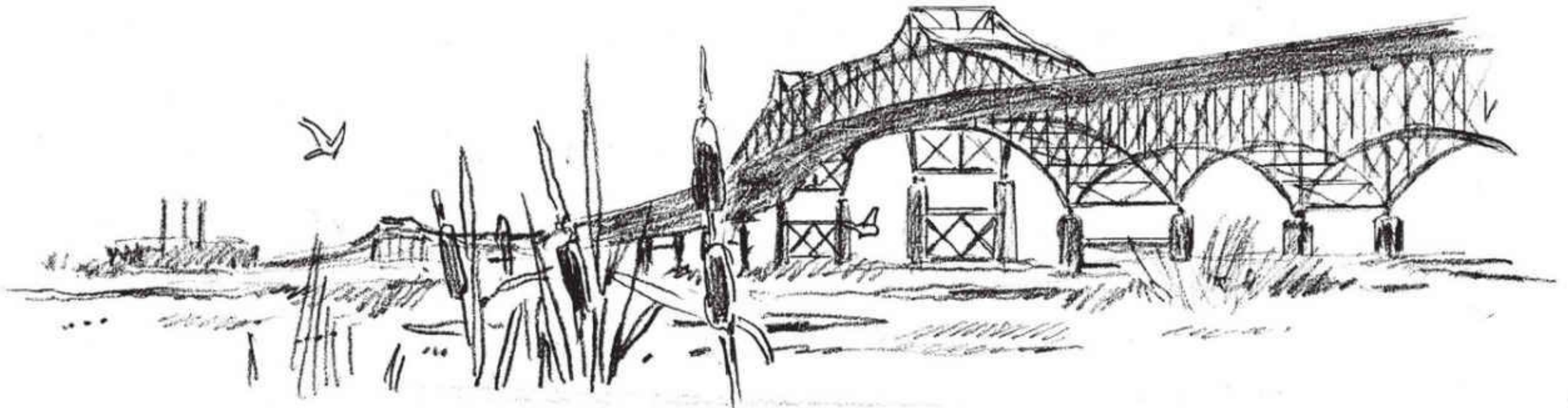
"It's over!" she continued. "The Sybil Danning next to Murray the Money Man is your Ghita. The kid is her sister, which is bullshit. These auditions are bullshit."

"What about Ronda?" I asked.

"Seems like everyone in the theater knew except for the third row," she added.

"Her father's a comic book artist," I explained. "That's how she knew about my stuff..."

"She's a porn star!" interrupted Linda. "Jasmine something-or-other is what she calls herself. Ronda, whatever her name is, doesn't have a snowball's chance in hell to be cast as Ghita, and she knew it."



Linda was singing *I'll Be Seeing You* as the Dodge sped past the grimy tunnel walls. It was appropriate. She was right. The movie, if it ever reached theatrical release, would be an unqualified disaster. My concept of Ghita would be unrecognizable. But Gray Stevens' daughter had paid me the highest compliment of my ignoble career. It was better than an Oscar.

The Pulaski Skyway vaults over the fetid green marshes of the Meadowlands. As we sped along they were a welcome sight. Even the truck depots and abandoned warehouses beckoned. It was good to be back in Jersey. Linda was going to drop me off at home. There was a 7 p.m. rehearsal at the Rahway Theater. She was cast as Miss Hannigan in *Annie*.

"Go right to the theater," I suggested. "I'll catch a cab home from there."

Linda agreed, and we arrived only a few minutes late. The old Rahway Theater had been renovated. It was now the Union County Arts Center. I followed Linda into the lobby. She hurried through the corridor that led to the stage and I lingered. The lobby was exactly as I had remembered it a half-century before.

I wandered into the auditorium. There, in the front row of the mezzanine, sat Fudder, eating from a box of JuJubes. Next to him Stebner and Eddie, each with a B-B Bat. Nearby sat Lenore Lans with Alice Peal. Behind them was a row of ladies of astounding proportions in a variety of revealing costumes. Mostly blondes, but a sprinkling of brunettes, and a redhead or two. On the screen was Maria Montez, as the Cobra Woman vamping a clean-limbed Jon Hall.

"Great job they did on the old theater," the cabdriver commented on the way to Scotch Plains.

"Yeah," I sighed.

"You from Rahway?" he asked.

"Yeah, a long time ago."

"I'm from Clark," he mumbled.

We stopped at a red light on Stanton Street. As we sat there a '33 Chevy approached on Saint Georges Avenue. There was a twelve-year old boy in the front seat. He waved at me as it chugged by. I waved back.



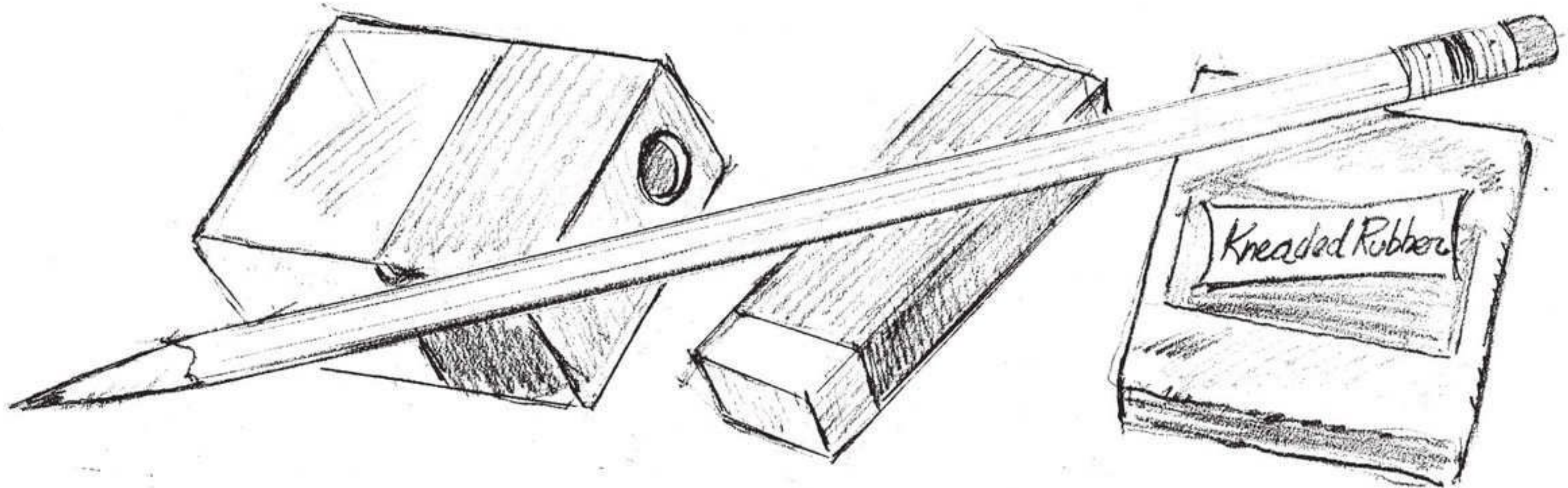


Welcome to the intimate section.

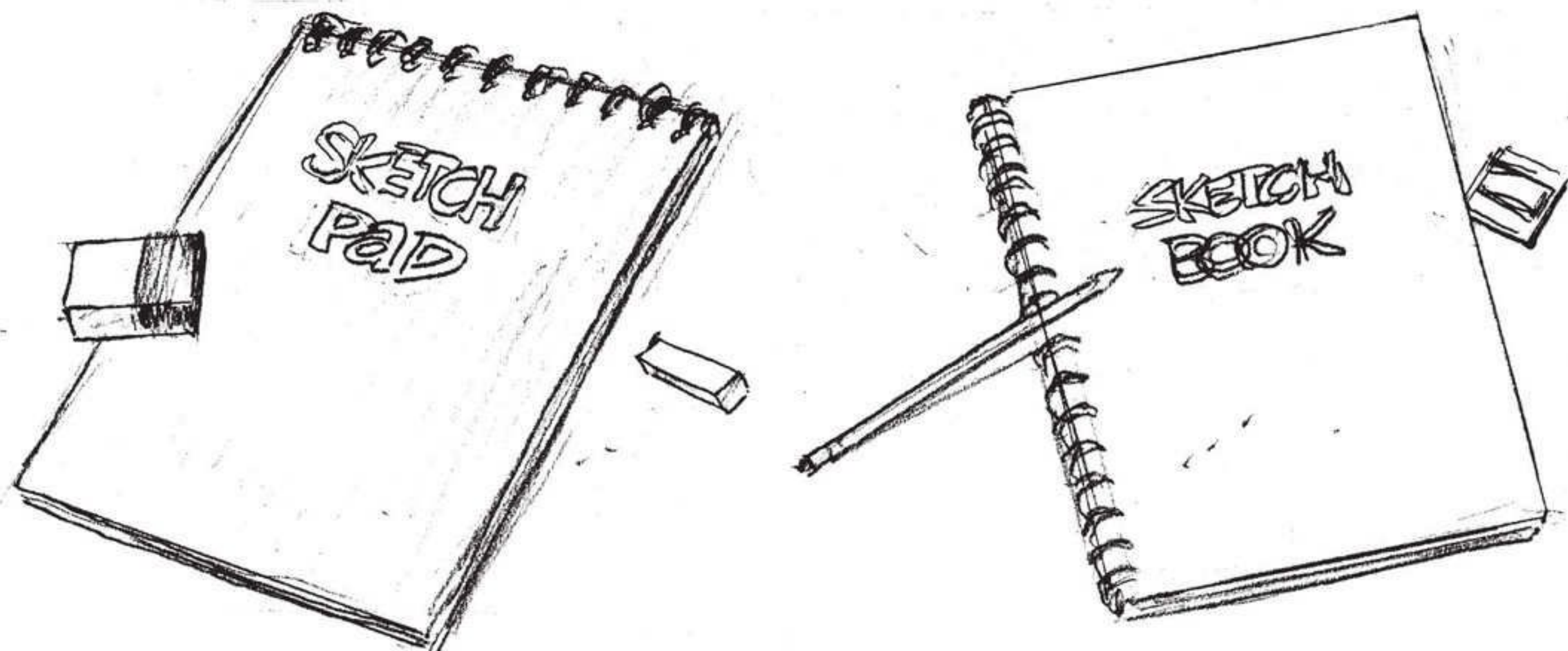
You've just finished the longest introduction to a simple drawing course in the annals of publishing. But its length and detail are instruction in itself. It could be considered a cautionary tale. Should you develop your drawing skills, you too may become involved with beautiful sexy women. If this prospect causes pustules of unease and raises the specter of ruination in the clutches of ladies of dubious virtue, you are excused from class.

If the possibility causes a swelling of desire to whittle a minor obsession into a soul-satisfying skill, we can proceed through the ecstasy part: practical notations on sketching the female form with a pencil.

Materials. Consider the lowly pencil. It offers itself to you in various degrees of hardness. Best you embrace a HB lead, or a #2, which is soft enough to produce a rich sensual line, yet hard enough not to break in the throws of amorous sketching. You'll soon learn to love it, but not without the frustrations of any new relationship.



Next, obtain a small portable pencil sharpener. You'll need a rubber or plastic eraser and a kneaded rubber eraser. The kneaded eraser is pliable. It can be molded into a soft oblong eraser perfect for a light pass over a drawing that won't eradicate the lines. It's good for smudge clean-up as well.



Finally, a pad of drawing paper or a sketch book. Nothing fancy. Visit your local art store or purveyor of stationery items. Total cost of supplies should be under ten bucks. Cheap.

Already there is a lady beckoning. You've got a date with Louie Fierstein's brainchild. Sidle up to her on the facing page. Don't be shy.

Now for a warm-up with Jugsy Malone. Imagine getting the script and reading Louie's notations on how Jugsy should look. Make her a tough blonde with big knockers, comrade! Long legs!...

Using your HB or #2, make a copy or a tracing of Jugsy, the same size as you see her. It's OK to trace at first, but the sooner you start drawing, the sooner you will realize your goddess. Start with the head and work down. Take your time. If you have the TV or stereo on, I'd suggest you first turn them off because Jugsy will get jealous that you're not concentrating on her. With that snub-nosed roscoe that she's toting, you'd better not piss her off.

Jugsy is very much a cartoon, drawn in the style of the period. Those extra long meaty legs and the wasp-waist make her a cinch to get down on paper.

Here's a tip that I still use. When you've finished Jugsy, turn your drawing over and hold it up to a strong light, so you can see the reverse image of your sketch through the paper. Check it out against my drawing. Flopping the image reveals errors in proportion. Head too large or small? Arms too short? Jugsy is very proud of her lengthy gams, so get 'em right, or else!

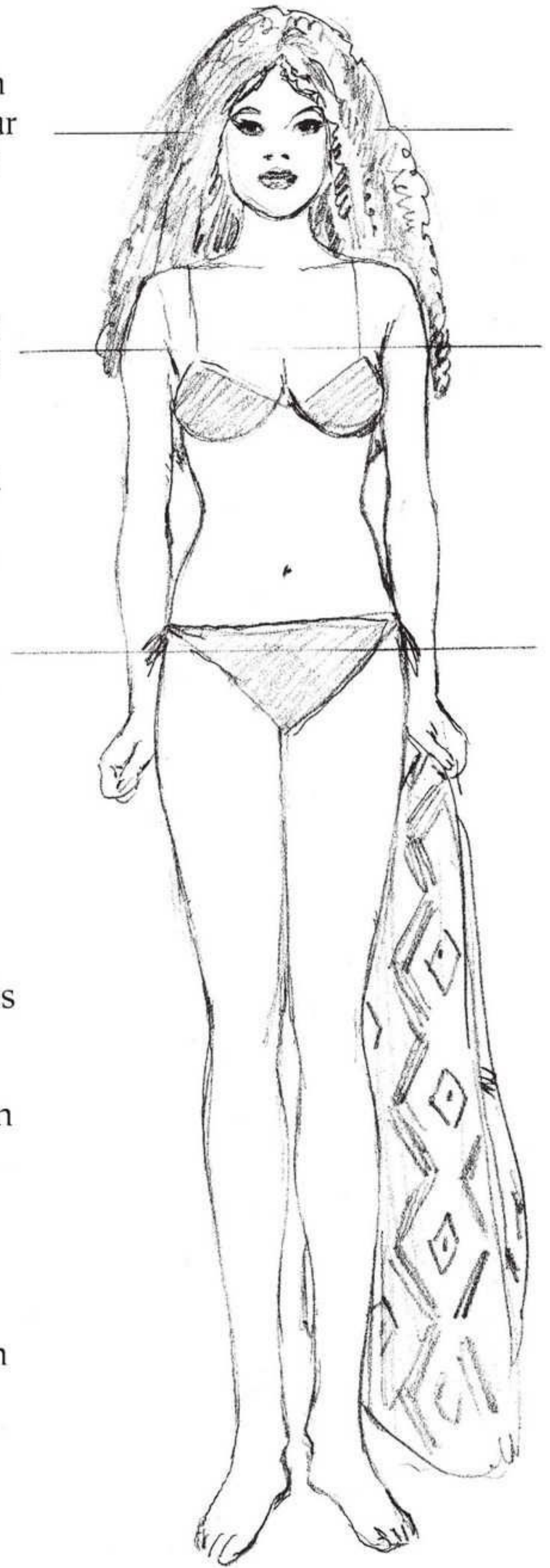


Let's visit a tropical paradise for a few minutes and contemplate Senorita Strothman's deep Dominican tan. "*Me gustas mucho.*" Hear that? She says she *likes* you!

Draw Lissa, on the left, standing poolside. Note how her abundant hair frames her upper body. Sketch light outlines at first. If you feel you need to erase, that's OK. Relax. Enjoy Lissa. As her form develops you can firm-up your lines as you work toward the finish.

Compare your drawings of Jugsy and Lissa. Note that our luscious Latino lady is conceived more realistically than the stylized Jugsy Malone. From now on we'll be focusing on drawing ladies from photos and life, but creating your own fantasy female from your imagination can be just as much fun.

Already you've got two drawings in your sketch-book! Now checkout Lissa in the rigid pose on the right side of this page.



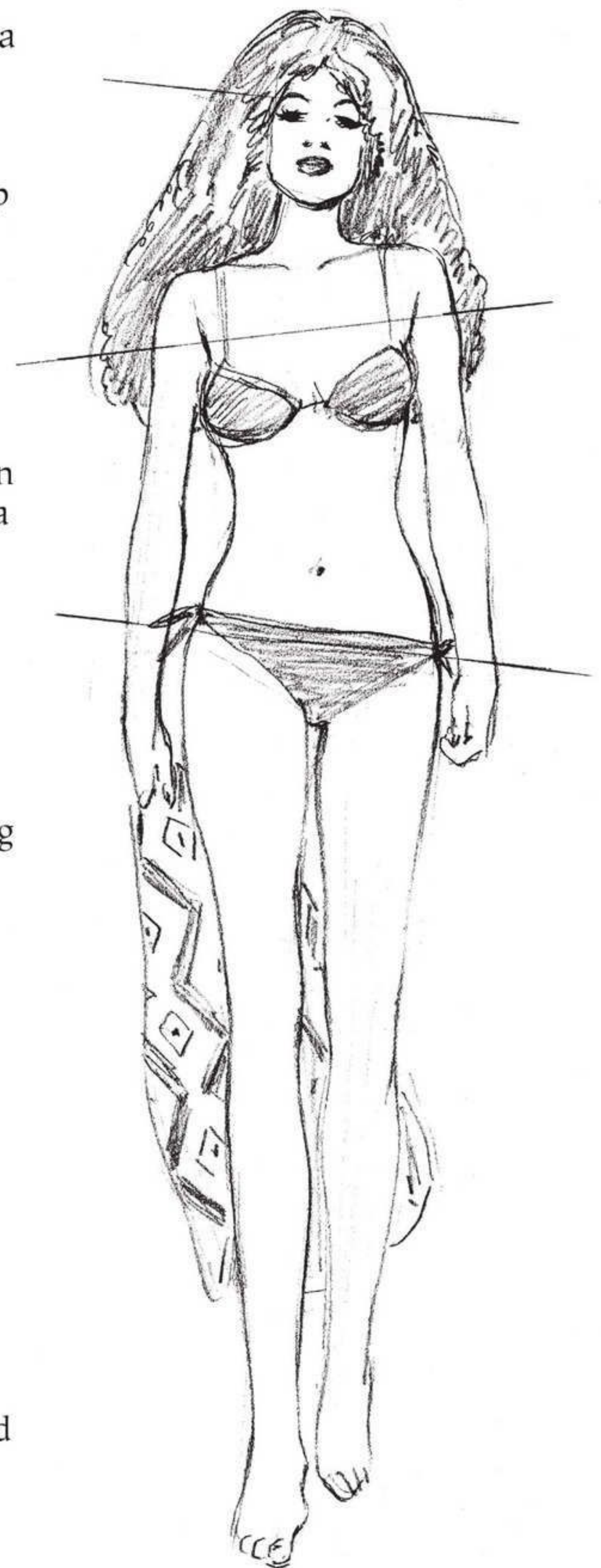
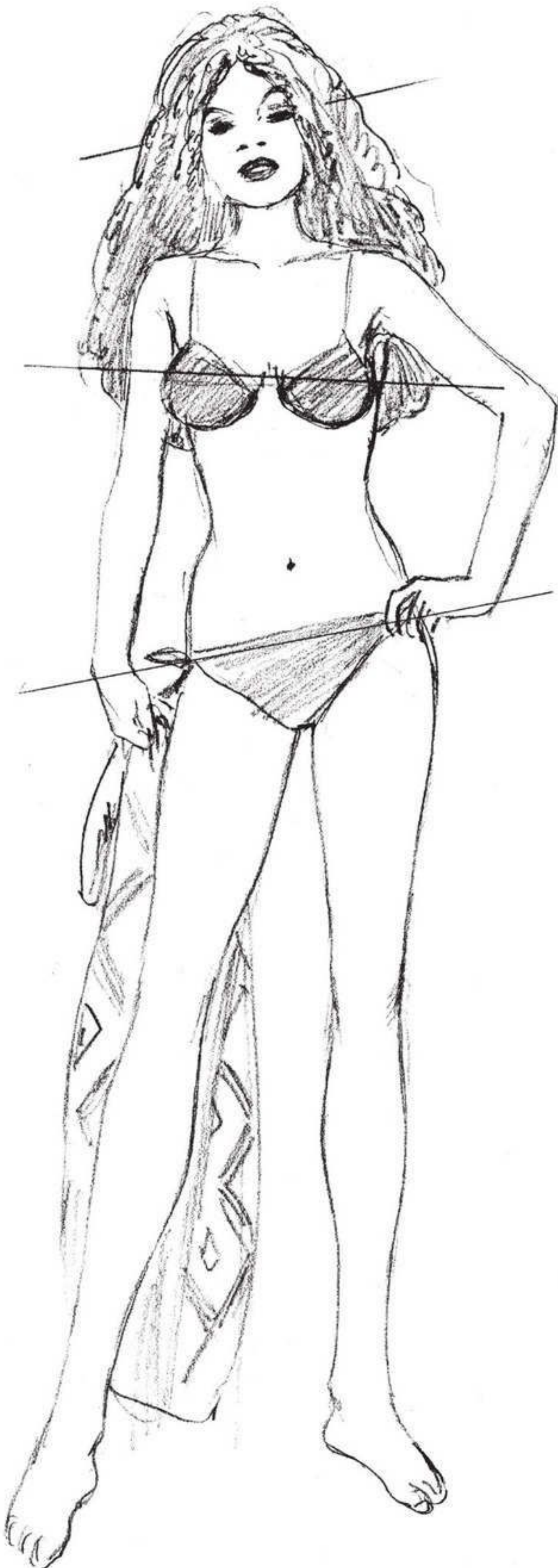
Lissa is standing at attention to show us the alignment of the head, ribcage, and the pelvis in a static pose. I've drawn horizontal lines across all three to illustrate the relationship. This will help us better understand **balance** in drawing the human figure.

Lissa, like all delightful ladies, is seldom static. On the left I've drawn her in a provocative stance. Note how the head tilts to her right as opposed to her ribcage and the pelvis aligns with her head.

On the right Lissa is taking a stroll around the pool. Her weight is on her right leg, which reverses the positions.

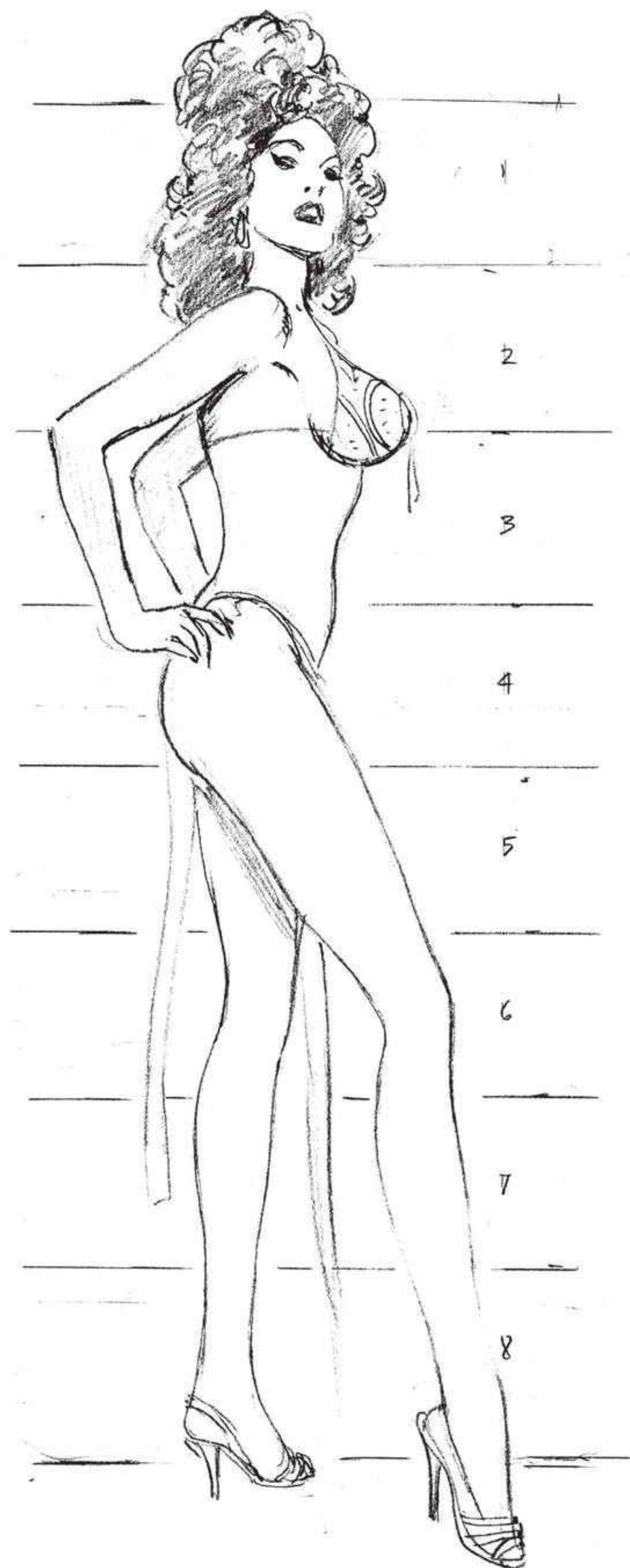
As Lissa walks, her left arm swings forward, and her leg sways behind. Conversely, with her left arm forward, her right leg is to the rear.

Standing or walking, avoid the static — keep your ladies curvy and sensual.





Wouldn't Louie have loved Minka! She was big all over. The Szechwan sizzler had heroic proportions. Draw her, then I'll share the secret of making ladies look tall, or if you prefer, short.



Note Lois De Fee, Fudder's favorite, next to Minka. Lois looked towering on stage, but she was just a tad over five feet tall. The Fabulous Fortune Cookie from Flatbush stood well over six feet high wearing just her stockings.

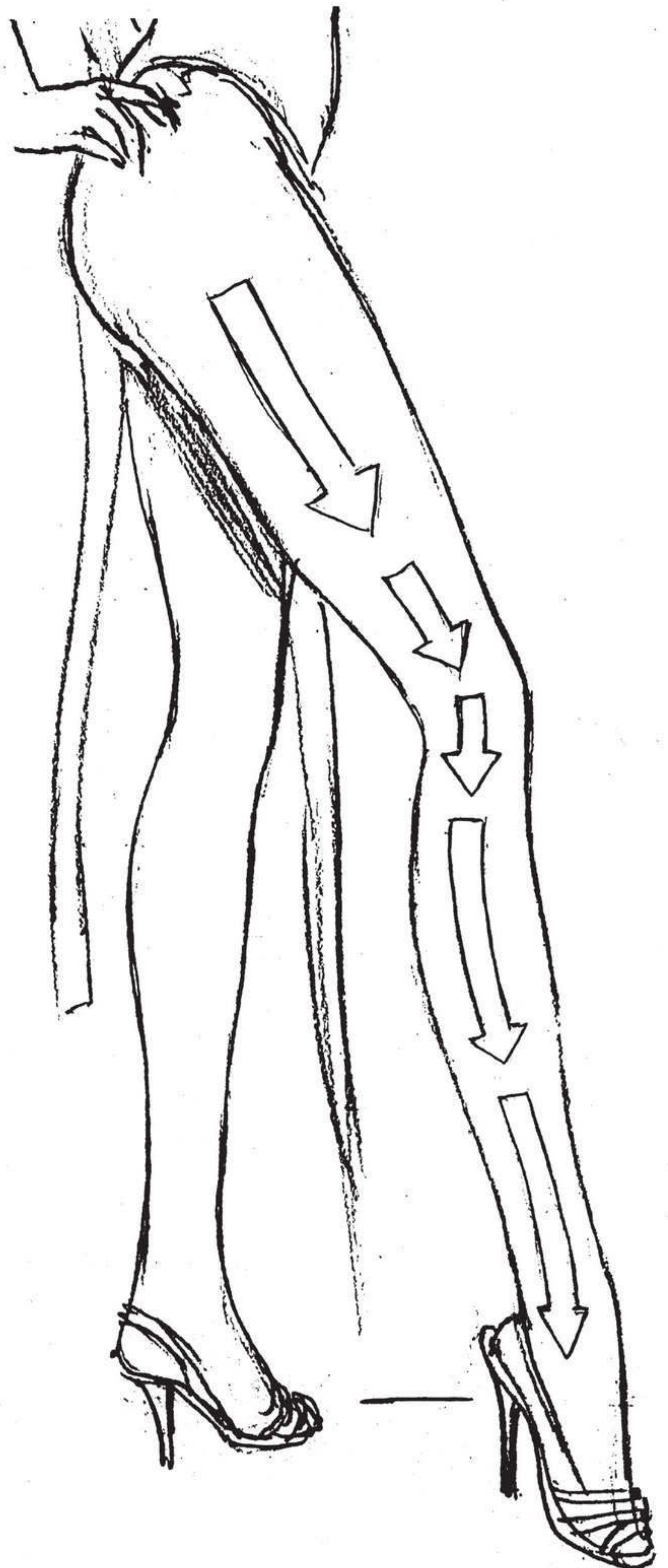
Minka was a good head taller than Lois. And that's the key. The average lady is eight heads high. Minka was nine heads tall. There's a scale behind Lois. Count the heads, four from top to G-string, four from G-string to toes. Now, starting down from Minka's head count all nine of them.

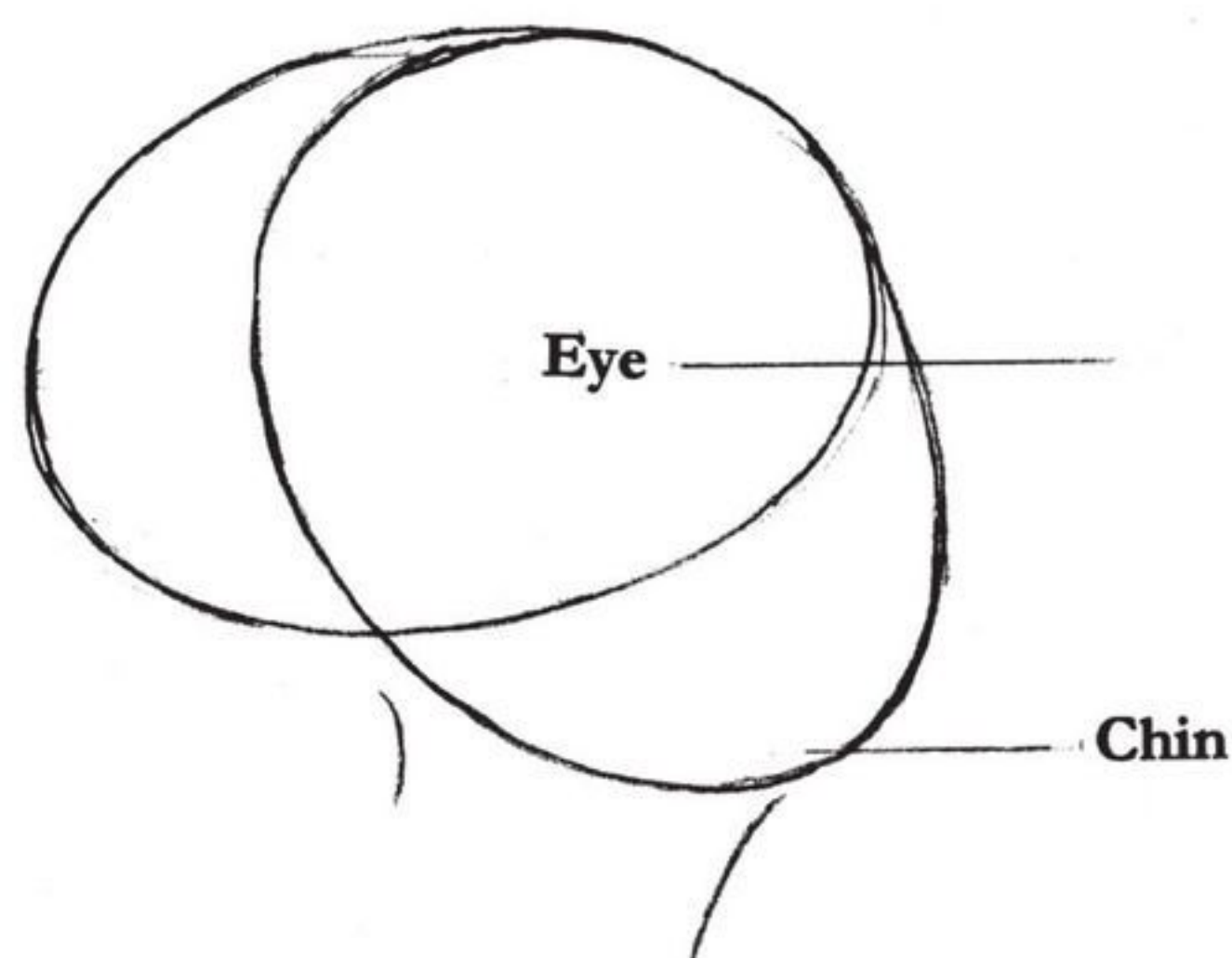
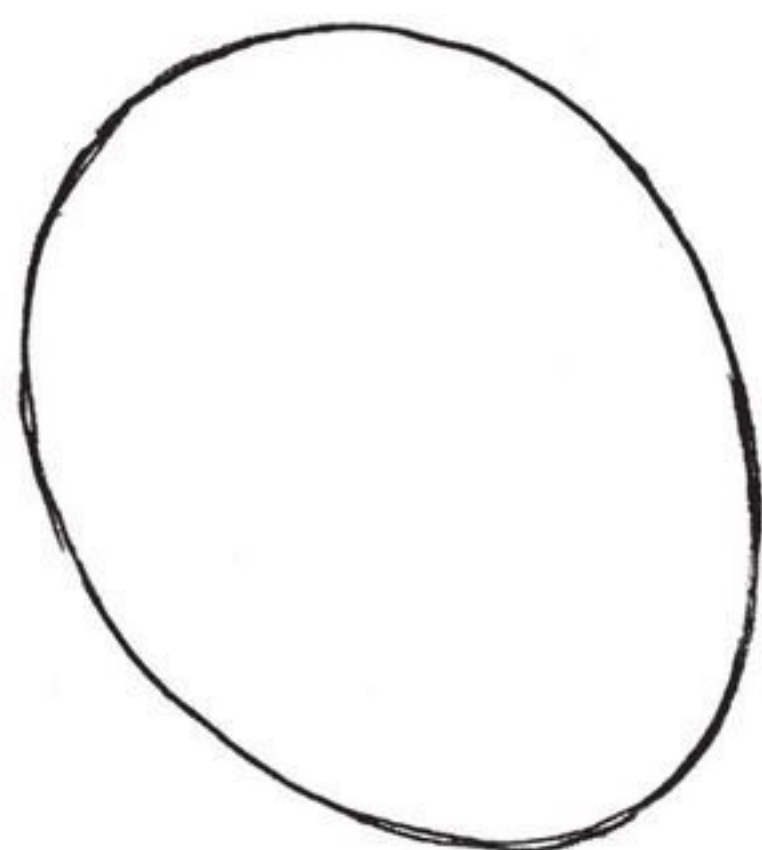
If you want your lady to be tall, add a head or two. It's like adding the mustard sauce to your Moo Goo Gai Pan. Season to taste! Bon appétit! If you want 'em shorter, hold the mustard!

Now gander at the delectable De Fee gams. I asked her to wear her high heels.

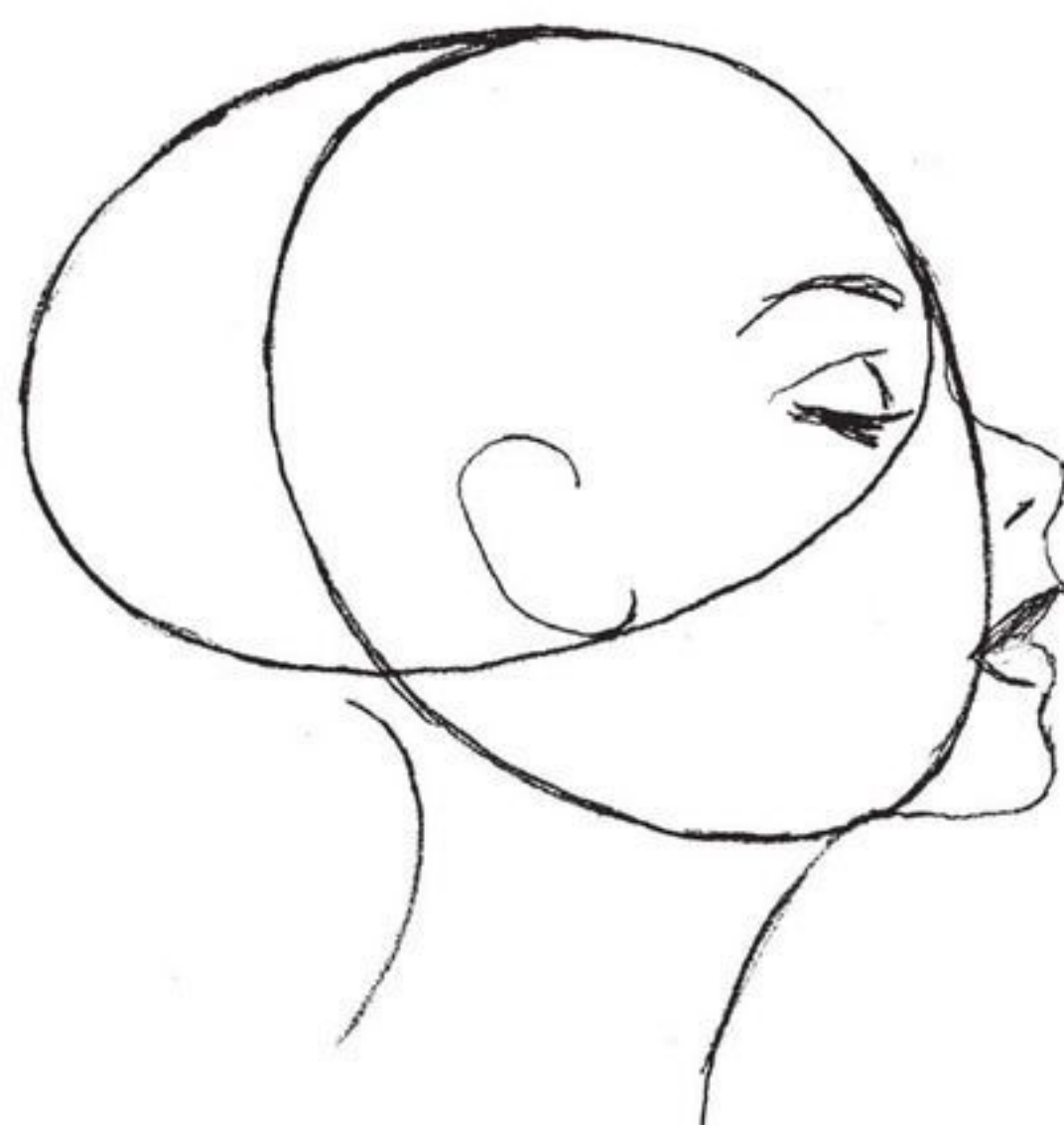
In heels her legs are urged into a sensual flow of unparalleled gracefulness. I've tracked its progression with arrows. Draw her leg and feel the rhythm yourself! It's pure linear Mozart!

Here's another secret about Minka and Lois. They, like all women, are wrapped in a thin, stealthy layer of fat. That's what makes them so cuddly and curvy. Try to use convex, continuous lines in your drawings. No valleys, just rolling heavenly hills of soft, eloquent flesh floating on that fabulous sheath of fat.

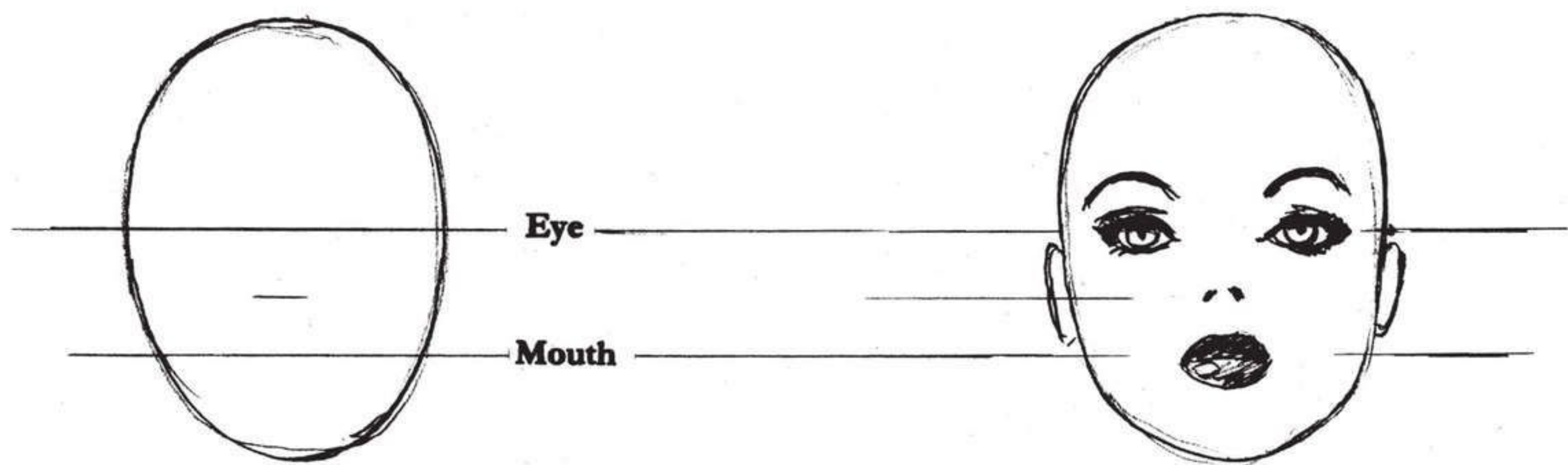




The mysterious Jasmine loves two eggs over easy. Start with one, then add a second as shown. This is the basic shape for her profile. Below left I've indicated grid lines to show the positions of the eyes, nose, and mouth.



Do your eggs, and start to feel Jasmine's profile on the superimposed eggs. Note how her forehead sits back over her nose. Be sure to tilt her sexy schnozzola upward over those luscious, full lips. Now comes the secret recipe for all my ladies. Hair. Plenteous amounts of gorgeous hair to set off the face.



Use one egg for a full face. After you've roughed in the shape of the head, start with the eyes. The eyes anchor the face. Easy on the nose. In a full-face sketch, just the indication of the nostrils will be enough. Let the eye of the beholder fill in the details. Don't worry. You're doing just fine!



See? Ronda, aka Jasmine, is blowing you a kiss! Now let's have a closer look at the windows of Ronda's soul, and beauty's emblem, her crimson lips...

As you copy these gorgeous peepers, note how the iris sits a bit under the upper lid. It floats just a tad above the lower eyelid. Seductive women's eyes should have punch. Accent them, with just a hint of an oriental tilt. It will make them seem larger, and make your drawing sing like Madonna.

Sexpot Ronda's lips should have the allure of a tropical rain forest. Think warm and moist. Let there be a highlight on the lower lip, it will give them a fullness of form. As 'Jasmine,' Ronda's lips became a sexual organ, a smile to keep in mind when rendering the mouths of your sexy ladies.



Larry Austin sure had it right: "It's like learning to play the piano," he'd declare. "Occasionally walking through the room where the piano is isn't the same as sitting down and practicing."

There *you* are, walking through a life peopled by beautiful women. You've got to sit down and practice drawing them.

Pencil sketches are remarkably enhanced by a plain paper copier. Make a copy or two, experimenting with the light/dark settings to get the best result. Try scanning your drawings into a computer graphics program. Lay gray tones or color on them. The results will be unpredictable, but sometimes quite effective. Make a copy for your model. It's an appropriate offering to a goddess.

Now we've got an appointment with Barrow Sloman. Barrow, you recall, was a Philistine, but he was crawling with a keen sense of the market, and how to sunder High Art with a flip of his stogy. Drawing sexy ladies is a low art, so this is a good place for the wrap.

We're in his office. I'll introduce you.

"Barrow, this is a friend of mine. He wants to know how he can get sexy models to draw from."

He's eyeballing you from behind his desk. "Skin mags!" he bellows. "Here are some free copies of *Keyhole*. They're loaded with beautiful dames. Draw 'em, dammit. Draw 'em all, and don't forget to give 'em big boobs." He points to a poster on the wall. "Look at 'em. That's Bonnie. There's a set of tits for you!" Now he's shaking your hand. "When you've drawn every one, come back and show me the stuff. I can always use somebody who can draw pretty women."

Finding copies of *Keyhole* these days might be difficult, but the newsstands are heavy with ladies' fashion issues and slick men's magazines. The Internet is crammed with images for you to print out and work from.

The best practice is from actual ladies. Once you get your sketchbooks filled with images, venture forth to public places. Take them along to parties or connect with a life class. You'll be surprised how cooperative a subject can be after they've seen your drawings.

I leave you with Maria Montez as the Tzarina. Actually, neither had breasts *that* large but, after all, I learned to exaggerate from Louie Feirstein, a *farshtinkener* cartoonist.

